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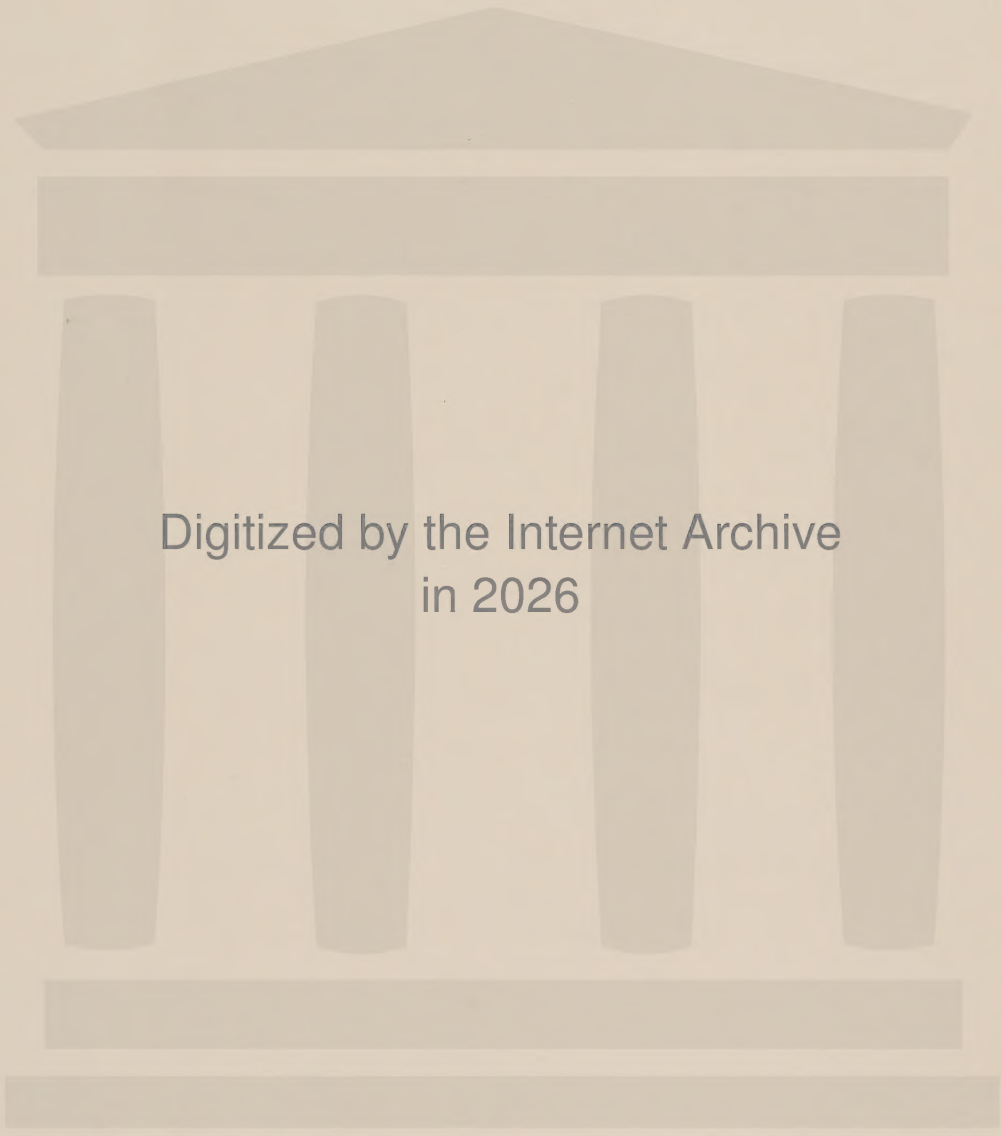
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A MINISTRY GROUP WITH PARENTS AFFECTED BY DIVORCE IN THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF LIMA, OHIO

A Ministry Research Project

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

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by

George Eugene Winters

May 1990

APPROVAL SHEET

A MINISTRY GROUP WITH PARENTS AFFECTED BY DIVORCE IN THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF LIMA, OHIO

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George E. Winters

Lima, Ohio

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Divorced persons face complicated parenting tasks. The absence of a biological parent in their families adds to the normal difficulties of parenting. As single parents, custodial or non-custodial parents, and stepparents, they face unique challenges in their relationships with their children. Christians taking seriously their responsibilities as parents following a divorce need the church to be supportive and instructive as they struggle to nurture their families. This ministry project provided parents affected by divorce with information on effective Christian parenting and offered a support group experience in the context of the local church.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project was to help parents affected by divorce become more effective as Christian parents. Parents affected by divorce include parents who are single or remarried, and stepparents. The number of parents affected by divorce has increased at the First Baptist Church over recent years. This ministry project intended to help these persons fulfill more effectively their difficult roles as parents.

Goals of the Project

The first goal of this project was to assess the needs of parents affected by divorce. A primary aim of the project was to meet actual needs experienced by these parents within our congregation.

The second goal was to develop a group study program to be used in a ministry group setting. This ministry group met for eight weeks in the context of and as part of the ministry of the First Baptist Church.

The third goal of this project was to help the participants improve their parenting skills. Information was shared with and discussed by group members concerning the effects of divorce on families. Parenting skills were related specifically to divorced parents and their children.

The fourth goal was to address any debilitating anxiety experienced by participants concerning their parenting responsibilities. Group members were encouraged to discuss their misconceptions, fears, and questions concerning the effects of divorce on themselves and their children in an atmosphere of trust, support, and Christian love.

Background of the Project

My interest in this project is related to my own experience as a divorced parent. I am the non-custodial

parent of two children from a previous marriage. I have discovered first-hand the unceasing challenges of long-distance parenting. For me, the role of parent has not ended with the tragedy of divorce. I feel responsible as a Christian parent to do whatever I can to maintain and further develop my relationships with my children.

Parenting following a divorce presents many challenges, especially for the Christian who is eager to continue to grow in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ. The guilt of divorce is sometimes overwhelming and demands time and energy to be addressed properly. The question of forgiveness, both of self and others, takes time to be answered, with much self-examination, contemplation, and prayer. When the demands of parenting are added to these post-divorce processes, it becomes clear why parenting is so difficult in the aftermath of divorce.

The fact that a divorce has taken place is shattering enough for one who has experienced it. The threat of more calamity ensuing from mismanaged parental responsibilities demands consideration be given to divorced parents. The church can be a place where support and information can be provided in the hopes of helping these parents succeed.

The number of persons in families affected by divorce has increased over the years at the First Baptist Church. My intention with this project was to create a supportive environment within our congregation to provide a

focused ministry to these special families. Single parents, custodial and non-custodial parents, and stepparents are all in need of special attention. Very few parenting resources available to the church focus on the issues unique to these families. Community parenting groups seldom address the specific needs of parents affected by divorce. When these issues are addressed, it is often from the viewpoint of single parents only (Parents Without Partners), or stepfamilies only (The Stepfamily Association of America). My aim is to bring together a variety of non-traditional families within the church to encourage a dialogue that will foster understanding and promote effective Christian parenting.

Methodology

Research was an important part of this project. Literary and social research was used throughout to accomplish the stated goals.

Research procedures

Literary research was used to examine the biblical material concerning parenting with a particular focus on relating a theology of stewardship to Christian parenting. This research formed the basis of a biblical and theological rationale for ministry with parents affected by divorce.

Literary research was also utilized in the development of the group study program. Literature in the

areas of child development, divorced parents, and parenting skills was investigated for the purpose of creating a curriculum suitable for the needs of the ministry group.

Social research has been used to assess the needs of the ministry group, test the study program, and evaluate the group experience. A focused interview (Appendix B) was conducted with the participants prior to the group experience. The interviews helped identify the needs of the participants and determine which topics selected for study received priority attention. A pretest and posttest (Appendix D) was administered to the participants at the beginning and end of the ministry group. The results of these tests are reported in chapter four as a measurement of the effects of the ministry group. A questionnaire (Appendix N) was also given to the participants at the conclusion of the group for the purpose of evaluating the ministry group experience.

Research Instruments

A focused interview was conducted with each of the participants prior to the ministry group. The interviews provided information from the participants about their parenting concerns in relation to the topics chosen for discussion in the group. Participants were asked to comment on the most pressing needs facing their families. Their responses were used as a guide in constructing the final form and content for the group sessions. The

interviews were conducted in home visits beginning two months before the start of the ministry group. The findings are reported in chapter three in the profile of the participants and their needs.

A pretest was administered to each participant during the first session of the ministry group and a posttest was administered during the final session. The tests were identical and measured knowledge and skills needed by parents in families affected by divorce. A semantic differential was included to measure the attitudes of five concepts: "marriage," "divorce," "parenting," "stepparent," and "stepchild." The results have been used to measure the effectiveness of the ministry group in achieving the third and fourth goals of the project. The results are reported with analyses in chapter four.

A questionnaire was given to each participant during the final session of the ministry group for the purpose of generally evaluating the ministry group experience and the group leader. The information gained will help in the formation of and curriculum design for future ministry groups. The results are a part of the conclusion to this project.

Limitations of the Project

The focus of this project was ministry with persons who have been divorced or who are married to divorced persons. These persons have children for whom they are

responsible. As single parents, custodial or noncustodial parents, and stepparents, a major concern for them was the proper care and nurture of their children. The theological question of divorce, therefore, was not addressed in depth in this project. The divorce or remarriage of the participants in the ministry group was not the issue. The project limited itself to the parenting concerns faced by these persons, especially those unique to their situations.

Chapter 2

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE FOR MINISTRY WITH PARENTS AFFECTED BY DIVORCE

Several important biblical and theological issues must be considered in order to engage properly in ministry with parents affected by divorce. In this chapter, a biblical perspective on parenting will lay the groundwork for an understanding of parenting as a gift from God. An examination of the family in the Old and New Testaments will provide the basis for an outline of the development of "the family of God" as a biblical theme. Next, a theology of stewardship will be developed to propose a distinctively Christian understanding of parents as stewards. Finally, five theological guidelines will be suggested to help parents affected by divorce better care for their children.

A Biblical Perspective on Parenting

An examination of parenting in the Old Testament is the starting place for a biblical perspective on parenting. This will allow the Old Testament and New Testament concepts of "family" to be placed in the proper context.

The Privilege of Parenthood

In Old Testament times, children were viewed as

gifts from God. The creation narratives, psalms, and writings of the prophets contain material that speak of children as a blessing given to humankind by God. Within the nation of Israel, children were valued and expected to grow up as participating members of the community.[1] To be a parent was a privilege that was an important part of Hebrew life.

Genesis 1:28. Walter Brueggemann considers the account of creation to be a "statement about *the blessing God has ordained into the process of human life.*"[2] The text under consideration reads:

> And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' (Gen. 1:28, RSV)

Claus Westermann considers the blessing of God referred to in this verse to be "effective in the begetting, conception, birth, and the succession of generations."[3] Gerhard von Rad agrees that "Man also receives from God's hand the blessing that enables him to propagate and increase."[4] In this view, God blessed man and woman at the time of creation with the

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[1] Lawrence Richards, A Theology of Children's Ministry (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1983), p. 20.

[2] Walter Brueggemann, Genesis, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 36.

[3] Claus Westermann, Genesis 1-11, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), pp. 161.

[4] Gerhard von Rad, Genesis, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 58.

ability to procreate. The biological fact of human reproduction was placed in the context of blessing. James Coffman adds to this view when he says, "The procreation and nurture of the continuing generation of mankind upon earth is a God-ordained privilege and commandment."[5] To regard parenthood in this way elevates it to a level of high status.

Genesis 30:22-24. Popular beliefs surrounding conception and birth were plentiful in the ancient world. In this account of the birth of Joseph, Rachel was frustrated with her inability to give Jacob a child. Rachel first blamed her husband for the situation, even though he had four sons with Leah. Jacob articulated the Old Testament understanding of childbirth in his answer: "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (Gen. 30:2). Rachel then sought the aid of mandrakes, a fruit believed to aid conception. Still, she had no children. Finally the text records that "God remembered Rachel, and God harkened to her and opened her womb," (Gen. 30:22). Gerhard von Rad clearly brings out the point that "The magic fruit did not at first help Rachel at all and when she finally did bear, it was not because of the mandrakes but because 'Yahweh remembered.'"[6]

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[5] James B. Coffman, Commentary of Genesis (Abilene: ACV Press, 1985), p. 9.

[6] von Rad, p. 290.

Psalm 127:3-5. These verses assert unequivocally that children are a "heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward," and declare, "Happy is the man " who has many sons. Artur Weiser describes this Psalm by saying "it praises children as a gift entrusted by God."[7] John Calvin, in a comment remarkably relevant to modern times, states:

> It is also to be added, that unless men regard their children as the gift of God, they are careless and reluctant in providing for their support, just as on the other hand this knowledge contributes in a very eminent degree to encourage them in bringing up their offspring.[8]

Considering children as a gift from God allows parents to have a perspective of blessing and privilege that undergirds the important role they play in their child's upbringing.

Isaiah 8:18. This understanding of children as gifts from God is part of the fabric of Israel's history. In his message to King Ahaz, Isaiah emphatically underscored his own faith in the presence and power of Yahweh. In testifying to his belief, Isaiah said, "Behold, I and the children the Lord has given me are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord of Hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion." In this context, Isaiah considers his children and those born to the nation of Israel to be reminders of God's presence and power. John Oswalt explains that Isaiah's children, in this text, are a

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[7] Artur Weiser, The Psalms, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 766.

[8] John Calvin, The Book of Psalms, trans. by James Anderson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 111.

"testimony of God's working among his people."[9]

Throughout the Old Testament, children are considered to be gifts from God. Parenthood is viewed as blessed by God. To be without children was a burden for a husband and wife. When God did grant children to a couple, they considered themselves privileged, indeed.

Roles Within the Family

The shape of the family changed considerably over the span of biblical times. From the strong Old Testament patriarchal system to the New Testament teaching of the Church as the family of God, the understanding of family life has altered down through the ages. The roles assumed by fathers, mothers, and children have also changed. A biblical perspective on parenting must take into account the various definitions of family life in the Bible.

The Hebrew Family. In the Old Testament the word mishpachah was used to describe both the clan and the tribe.

> The family unit itself (clan) was part and parcel of a still wider unity of the tribe, the people of the Covenant. Within this covenant, all persons were considered brothers or neighbors to one another.[10]

Baith was used to indicate the place of residence for a household. The household included all that belonged to a

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[9] John N. Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 236.

[10] Roy Fairchild and John Wynn, Families In the Church (New York: Association Press, 1961), p. 58.

man in this patriarchal structure, which usually included a wife or wives, concubines, children, relatives, and slaves. The husband in Hebrew life was ba'al, or master of his household, including the power of life and death (Gen. 33:24).

The importance of the family in the Old Testament can be seen in the use of covenant. In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God made a covenant with Noah and his family not to destroy humanity again with a flood. The covenant made with Abraham provided that blessings would come through Abraham and his descendants to "all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3).

The central and dominant member of the Hebrew family was the father. As the unquestioned authority of the home, the father was the master of his household. Along with this position of prominence came the responsibility of oversight. The father was expected to protect the welfare of all members of his family and assure its success and preservation. Although the education of children was shared by fathers and mothers, fathers were primarily accountable to see that spiritual, social, and economic issues were properly addressed.[11]

Both parents were highly esteemed in the Hebrew family. Exodus 20:12 made clear that children were to honor not only their fathers, but their mothers as well.

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[11]Lockyer, Herbert, Sr., ed., Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), p. 376.

"A mother's status in this commandment is higher than in any other legal system of antiquity."[12] Hebrew mothers were expected to play an important role in the education of their children, as Proverbs 1:8 makes clear: "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching." Domestic duties were primarily assigned to mothers, but they were also respected and honored within society.

Since children were considered gifts from God, children were a very important part of Hebrew family life. In chapters six and eleven of Deuteronomy, the importance of children as the key to passing on the faith of Israel is stressed. As Yahweh spoke of his commandments, he said "teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise, (Deut. 11:19). Lawrence Richards describes the importance of this generational heritage:

> What one generation has known through personal experience with God must somehow be communicated to a new generation that lacks those experiences. Yet faith must be communicated. The new generation must come to know, to love, and to obey the God of their parents.[13]

The Family in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the idea of family as

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[12] Edith Deen, Family Living In the Bible (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 77.

[13] Richards, p. 23.

"household" is retained in the use of oikos. The patriarchal system also was the predominant cultural structure for families. Fathers were to continue to bring up their children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," (Eph. 5:4). Fathers were responsible to provide for their families, heeding the warning, "If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever," (I Tim. 5:8).

In two instances in the book of Mark, Jesus quoted the commandment of honoring mothers and fathers (Mk. 7:10, 10:19). It is clear that both mothers and fathers were to be given respect within the New Testament family. This can be seen also in the inclusion of this commandment in the household code of Ephesians 6:2. Children in the New Testament were commanded to be obedient to their parents, "for this pleases the Lord," (Col. 3:20).

In the teachings of Jesus concerning the value and place of the natural family, a definite break from traditional Hebrew concepts can clearly be seen. Even though the family was the dominant social structure within Hebrew society, Jesus challenged his followers to see their families from a new perspective. When commenting on his own family, Jesus said "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother," (Mk. 3:35). In Luke 14:26, Jesus set the stage for this new understanding of family. He told the multitude eager to hear his message that they must be

willing to hate their own "father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters" in order to be his disciples. To the Hebrew trained to love family above all, this must have sounded like heresy. To William Sheek, however, Jesus was simply redefining the family for the Christian. Sheek says:

> Jesus created a radically new understanding of family. Family was really the family of God and consisted of those having a common commitment of faith. At times this family of God was in tension with the natural family.[14]

For the purpose of service to God and his kingdom, singleness is even given as an option in the New Testament, departing from established Old Testament tradition (I Cor. 7:25-38).

This new emphasis on allegiance to God over family is echoed by Paul in Galatians 3:22 where relationships are defined as equal before God. New Testament writers have a great concern for the community of faith serving God and one another within the koinonia of believers. "Marriage and family life are important, but the primary concern of the New Testament is with the family of faith, the church."[15]

A Theology of Stewardship

Because of the biblical teaching that children are

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[14]G. William Sheek, The Word On Families (Nashville: Abington Press, 1985), p. 39.

[15]Kenneth E. Swenson, "Guidelines for Ministry Within the Home" (D. Min. project, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1984), p. 21.

gifts from God and parenthood a blessed vocation, biblical parenting can be viewed as being responsible before God to care for and love one's children. This natural emphasis on responsibility introduces the theme of stewardship. A brief review of biblical stewardship will lead to the proposition that Christian parents need to apply the principles of stewardship to the task of caring for their children.

Stewards of God

The word translated as "steward" in the New Testament is the word oikonomos, which occurs twenty times. Originally describing a housekeeper, a steward gradually came to refer to one who was in charge of part or all of the property and affairs of another. Jesus told about stewards in some of his parables (Luke 12:42, 16:1ff). The early church used the term to describe the sense of responsibility a believer was to exhibit in response to God's call. Paul wrote, in I Corinthians 4:1, that he and those working with him should be regarded as "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." Peter encouraged the members of the early church to be "good stewards of God's varied grace," by using their gifts in service to one another (I Peter 4:10).

The principle of stewardship is developed and widely used by the New Testament writers. The idea of being responsible to God for the upkeep and preservation of the creation, however, is present in the Old Testament as well.

W. Clyde Tilley relates Christian stewardship to the Old Testament concept of human dominion over the created order in the creation narratives (Gen. 1:26). Tilley feels there is a "striking theological affinity between human dominion and Christian stewardship." This affinity exists because "both dominion and stewardship underscore the imperative of faithfulness [to God] in their responsible discharge."[16]

Many passages in the Old Testament describe the importance of a thanksgiving offering to God for his blessings and the cultural significance of the tithe. Malachi 3:10 says,

> Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

Richard Scheef, Jr., points to God's sovereignty as basic to understanding the Old Testament conception of stewardship. Scheef believes that, to the Hebrew, "God is the sovereign Creator who has entrusted to man the utilization of all the earth."[17]

When stewardship is discussed in many churches today it is most often used in references to the financial responsibilities of members. This frequent use of stewardship to refer exclusively to matters of financial

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[16]W. Clyde Tilley, "A Biblical Approach to Stewardship," Review and Expositor, 84 (1987), p. 435.

[17]Richard L Scheef, Jr. "Stewardship in the Old Testament," in Stewardship in Contemporary Theology, ed. T. K. Thompson (New York: Association Press, 1960). p. 19.

responsibility severely limits the scope of this concept. Tilley believes this financial emphasis limits the idea of stewardship unnecessarily.

> It is an unfortunate impoverishment of our understanding of stewardship which changes its more life-embracing sweep to a narrower focus upon financial matters, or even to an equation with tithing.[18]

A. R. Fagan articulates his agreement when he says:

> When we talk about stewards and stewardship, then, we are talking about much more than financial matters; we are talking about life itself. The Bible teaches that a steward is one whose relationships in every area of life are built upon his understanding that every good and perfect gift is from God. He strives to treat them as such, knowing that one day he will give an account of his stewardship.[19]

A definition of stewardship must, therefore, be comprehensive in its scope. Since God has created us with dominion over the creation and redeemed us in Christ, we are to view all of life as lived in gratitude to God for his acts of creation and redemption. As T. A. Kantonen says, "stewardship is an expression of the restored direct personal relation to God. Its structure is thus remarkably simple: the divine gift and the human response."[20]

Stewardship, rightly understood, affects much more than just property and financial matters. It is our response to God in a lifestyle of responsibility. It is our

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[18]Tilley, "A Biblical Approach to Stewardship," p. 434.

[19]A. R. Fagan, What the Bible Says About Stewardship (Nashville: Convention Press, 1976), p. 16.

[20]T. A. Kantonen, "Stewardship and Christian Doctrine," in Stewardship in Contemporary Theology, ed. T. K. Thompson (New York: Association Press, 1960), p. 171.

way of living life in relation to the creator and redeemer of life. As Paul Stagg defines it:

> From the biblical point of view stewardship is grateful and obedient response to God for His undeserved gifts, acknowledging Him as the ultimate owner and sovereign Lord of life, which is held as a trust issuing in the voluntary and responsible use of one's total self and possessions to the glory of God and in loving service to one's neighbor.[21]

Parents as Stewards

Responsibility to God for his gifts in all of life encompasses the biblical concept of stewardship. In considering parents and their children, it is clear that Christian parents are responsible for the economic, social, and religious welfare of their children. The instruction in I Timothy 5:8, that a member of the church ought to "provide for his relatives, and especially his own family," makes clear the intention of parental duty. Even in an environment where a higher loyalty was to be paid to God and to his kingdom, New Testament parents, like all parents, assumed the role of primary providers for their children.

The biblical context in which parenting is placed is the view of children as gifts from God. In the ongoing process of creation, parents participate in the gift of new life to their children. From a Christian perspective, the responsibility to care for a child's new life can be considered as an act of stewardship. Christian parents

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[21] Paul Leonard Stagg, "An Interpretation of Christian Stewardship," in What is The Church?, ed. Duke K. McCall (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), p. 148.

experience the privilege of parenthood within the framework of biblical stewardship. Out of a sense of gratitude to God for the gracious gift of new life, parents accept the responsibility to lovingly care for their children.

Including the principle of Christian stewardship in one's attitude toward the care of children is intended to help Christian parents improve the amount and intensity of their nurture. It is one thing to describe parental love accurately but quite another to display that love in an appropriate way. As J. E. Dillard insightfully points out:

> There is no use for one to say, 'I love my parents, my wife, my children, my savior, my church, my country,' and do nothing for them and give nothing to them. Love always gives.[22]

If parental love is to be a giving love, then the doctrine of Christian stewardship can be an invaluable aid in the development of responsible, loving parents.

Theological Guidelines for Parents Affected by Divorce

Parents who are either divorced or married to a divorced person face the normal frustrations and challenges encountered by all parents. Divorce, however, creates extra difficulties that strain relationships within the family to a tremendous degree. Christian parents in this situation struggle to follow the teachings of the Bible while managing the stress created by family disruption. The following

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[22] J. E. Dillard, Good Stewards (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1953), p. 35.

theological guidelines point in the direction of spiritual wholeness in the face of this disruption and confusion. Parents accepting Christian stewardship of their children can utilize these guidelines to help them find ways to care for their children and let love grow in their family relationships even in the devastating aftermath of divorce.

Responsibility

"Responsibility is central to the whole idea of stewardship."[23] From the perspective of stewardship, responsibility lays the groundwork for other attitudes and actions as a response to the love of God in Christ. In response to the grace of God, parents willingly accept the role of caretaker for their children. Understanding the responsibilities inherent in parenthood enables Christian parents to fulfill their duties as parents effectively.

In the case of divorced parents, the acceptance of parental responsibility becomes even more crucial. When parents separate in a divorce, their family ceases to be intact. Arrangements for custody of the children are decided upon either mutually between the couple or by the court. These arrangements drastically alter the physical make-up of the family. Children must change from living in a two-parent household to a one-parent household through no choice of their own. The specific custody configurations

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[23] James R. Sexton, Jr., "Stewardship Education in the First Baptist Church of Wetumpka, Alabama" (D. Min. project, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988), p. 56.

determine the new shape of the post-divorce family. Joint custody allows the children to alternate equally between parents. When one parent retains full custody, the children only see the other parent when the visitation schedule allows. The possibility exists in this situation for the absent parent to be prevented from seeing the children for long periods of time. The frequency of visitation often depends on the geographical distances between parents following a divorce.

The financial support of children also becomes an issue for parents following a divorce. For the parent with sole custody, finances are a concern because of the difficulties of working as a single parent. For the absent parent, finances are a concern due to payments for support, children's medical expenses, and the cost involved in visitation. Both parents worry about having the money needed to provide properly for their children while trying to maintain their momentum in the emotional and spiritual struggles that constitute the trauma of divorce.

The temptation for Christian parents is to ignore or lessen the attention they give to the responsibilities of parenthood. Divorce ends a couple's husband-wife relationship, but it only changes the parent-child relationship. A parent is still a parent following a divorce. Parental responsibilities do not end with the divorce decree. The principle of stewardship encourages Christian parents to continue to be diligent as parents

following a divorce. For example, visitation should be allowed by custodial parents and pursued by non-custodial parents. Parents should see their responsibility for the well-being of their children as a mandate to ensure positive visitation experiences. Too often parents who are bitter and angry over divorce issues either refuse visitation to an absent parent or, if they are the absent parent, ignore the visitation privileges to which they have been granted.

Also, financial obligations to children should not be ignored by divorced parents. Child support payments should be regarded as a way of carrying out the principles of Christian stewardship. Parents paying child support should be prompt with payments and make them in full compliance with all legal agreements. Parents receiving payments should use them appropriately in the care of their children. Fulfilling parental responsibilities following a divorce is a challenge. Understanding these responsibilities from the perspective of Christian stewardship makes accepting the challenge a vital part of Christian discipleship.

Commitment

Parenting following a divorce is difficult. As Virginia Smith says, "Becoming a single parent may be like giving birth to a barbed wire fence - extremely painful."[24]

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[24]Virginia Watts Smith, The Single Parent (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1983), p. 37.

In order to be good stewards in the care of their children, divorced parents must possess a high degree of commitment. Divorce is a process that develops over time and culminates in the legal granting of a decree. Parenthood is a process that begins at birth and lasts a lifetime. The need of children for their parents is not under the jurisdiction of the courts. Parents may be separated from their children following divorce, but they always remain their parents.

The life-long nature of parenthood demands commitment to the task in the face of the challenges of divorce. Immediately following a divorce, parents may be motivated to pay close attention to the needs of their children. This motivation may come from the guilt accompanying divorce, anxiety about the future, or a number of other dynamics associated with this family crisis. As months turn into years and the lives of the parents evolve, opportunity for changes in attitude abound. A remarriage may introduce a new family situation for one or both of the parents. New career responsibilities may shift locations and schedules. The birth of other children adds new pressures and obligations.

Commitment to the task of parenting following divorce means a long-term view of the process. Whatever changes occur for parents following the break-up of their marriage, they need to remain committed to the proper care of their children. The privilege of parenthood carries with it the demand that Christian parents commit themselves to

the continued oversight of their children, even, and especially, following a divorce.

Faithfulness

Faithfulness is a key element in the New Testament understanding of stewardship. The Authorized Version of 1 Corinthians 4:2 reads: "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Biblical faithfulness concerns itself with dependability, loyalty, and stability.[25] God is faithful to humankind in all ways, and especially in forgiveness (1 John 1:9) and salvation (Heb. 10:23).

Christian parents who are divorced need to develop a strong sense of faithfulness toward their children. When facing the unsettling experiences of a divorce, children need to know that their parents are always going to love them and care for them no matter what the circumstances. Being dependable as a parent following divorce means making an effort to be available to one's children even in the confusing and hectic times. Custodial parents who are busy improving their education or earning money need to arrange their schedules so that there will be quality time for their children. Non-custodial parents need to be diligent in their promise of visitation. Children need to know that parents will visit them at the expected time and place.

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[25]Lockyer, p. 374.

Loyalty becomes an issue for children when parents remarry. Since children seek the assurance that their parents will always love them and care for them, the appearance of a stepmother or stepfather immediately creates tension. The issue from the point of view of the child is whether or not a stepparent will lessen a parent's love for that child. Christian parents wanting to be faithful stewards will communicate clearly to their children that their love is not contingent on external circumstances such as remarriage.

Caring

Divorce is traumatic and disruptive. It causes one to focus narrowly on issues of emotional, physical, and spiritual survival for a period of time. Parents experiencing the shock of divorce have the added concern of looking out for the welfare of their children. At the same time that divorcing or divorced parents may feel consumed with the problems and pain of their own lives, they also have their children to guide and direct. Often the problems and stresses can seem overwhelming. Christian parents are exhorted by the principles of biblical stewardship to care deeply about their children at all times. Even when dealing with the pain of divorce, Christian parents are challenged to find clear ways to express their feelings of caring to their children.

Some parents who are affected by divorce are not

divorced themselves. A stepparent is sometimes a person who is married for the first time to a person with children from a previous marriage. In a situation such as this, the ability to express genuine caring is of special concern. Even though stepparents do not have a biological relationship with their stepchildren, they do play an important role in their nurture and development. Due to the nature of their roles as spouses to natural parents, stepparents are in a position to significantly affect stepchildren. Being a stepparent is enormously difficult, however, partly because of the stereotypes prevalent in our culture. In commenting on stepmothers, Richard Gardner says:

> In legend, story, and fairy tale, stepmothers have traditionally been cruel and wicked. And in real life, as well, stepmothers are not commonly portrayed as benevolent.[26]

Genuinely caring for stepchildren is often difficult because of the obstacles present in the role. Persons who become stepparents will make the attempt to care for their stepchildren in an expression of their stewardship as Christian parents.

Self-giving Love

The love of parents for their children is a natural part of parenthood. Mothers and fathers look upon their children with a deep and lasting love. Jesus emphasized the depths of parental love to his disciples as he described

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[26]Richard A. Gardner, The Parents Book About Divorce (New York: Doubleday & Co. 1977), p. 349.

his own love for them: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love," (John 15:9).

As parents cope with divorce, their love for their children is tested. The emotional needs of children of all ages increase due to the strains and stresses of divorce. Demands upon parents are high to reach out in reassuring love to children caught in the midst of a divorce experience. Following a divorce, families must regroup and work out new ways of relating. Familiar patterns no longer succeed in communicating tenderness and warmth. Step-families are created and reorientation becomes the major task as families are blended together. New career directions appear as new identities emerge. Children in these kinds of situations search for signs of stability, security, and love.

Christian parents must realize parenthood following divorce will confront them with complex and difficult circumstances. Jesus' teachings against divorce indicate the seriousness of marital breakdown. The ability to express self-giving love is absolutely essential for parents desiring to be good stewards in relation to their children. Self-giving love enables divorced parents to have the extra amount of patience they need as they struggle with their child-raising duties. Self-giving love enables divorced parents to listen to their children even when they feel no one is listening to them. Self-giving love provides the motivation to put extra effort in making sure that children

are being cared for in a proper manner. Self-giving love helps parents guard against the negative effects of pity or jealously which often accompany divorce. Self-giving love helps build confidence in parents experiencing crises in their own self-esteems. Christian parents who are willing to relate to their children in this manner open themselves up to the rejuvenating and empowering effects of the Holy Spirit as they follow the biblical injunction to "make love your aim," (1 Cor. 14:1).

Summary

Christian parents who must face the trials and challenges of divorce need not despair. They must willingly and readily accept the responsibility for their children, even though they may cease to live in the same house, or city, with them. Christian parents must understand their position as stewards of the gift of life and strive to fulfill their duties with gratitude. They must be committed and faithful to their children, caring for them and consistently reaching out to them in self-giving love.

These parental obligations, however, must be kept in the biblical perspective of the privilege of parenthood and inclusion in the family of God. The joys of parenthood, the nurturing, caring, exhilarating feelings of being a part of the creation and continuation of a new life, is not negated by a divorce. The role of being a parent continues, even though within a new and different context. Spiritual

growth also continues, the spiritual growth of children as they learn of their Savior and become followers of Jesus Christ themselves. The family of God is large enough to receive all kinds of human families and their members. Together, as stewards of God's grace, we celebrate the parenthood of God as we join in fellowship together as sons and daughters of God. Christian parents affected by divorce labor to do their best with the knowledge of God's blessing upon them as they do.

Chapter 3

THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY GROUP WITH PARENTS AFFECTED BY DIVORCE

The design of my ministry project included the selection of members for a ministry group. The participants in the ministry group all belonged to the congregation of the First Baptist Church of Lima. The first task was to recruit interested parents. Assessing their needs helped determine the priorities given to the subjects selected for group study and discussion. The group met once each week for eight weeks. This chapter will describe the formation and implementation of the ministry group.

The Design of the Group

The members of the ministry group were selected from parents in our congregation who were either divorced or married to someone who had been previously divorced. Interviews were conducted to determine the interests of these persons in relation to the purpose of the group.

The Enlistment of Participants

The first determination for possible membership in the ministry group was the age of the participants' children. Divorced parents in our congregation who do not

have children of high school age or younger were not considered. The focus was placed from the beginning on parents with minor children still living at home.

A list was compiled from our church membership (600 members) of all persons either divorced, remarried, or married to previously divorced persons, who had children of these ages. The number of persons in this category was twenty-one. A letter was sent to these persons briefly describing the ministry group and asking for an indication of their interest (Appendix A).

A self-addressed stamped postcard was included in this letter. The postcard asked for an "interested" or "not interested" response. Six postcards were returned within one week. Five of these indicated "interested." Another postcard was sent to those not responding three weeks after the initial mailing. This card was a reminder, with a final deadline indicated when the card needed to be returned to the church office. Three more postcards were returned by the deadline, all of them indicating interest in the group.

Telephone contacts were made with the persons still not responding by the deadline. When the phone calls were concluded, a total of fifteen persons had indicated interest and agreed to an interview to receive more information about the ministry group. Following a detailed explanation of the purpose, goals, and structure of the group, given to the participants during the subsequent interviews, all fifteen agreed to participate in the ministry group experience.

Assessing the Needs of the Participants

A structured interview was conducted with each participant to help determine the content of the group sessions (Appendix B). All participants were interviewed during home visits except for two participants who were interviewed at the church. Interviews with married couples were conducted with both persons present.

The questions in the interview reflected six areas of concern for parents affected by divorce. Each participant was asked to give a priority ranking to each of the six areas of concern. Table 1 contains the participant's responses to these questions.

Table 1

Responses to Pregroup Interview

	High priority	Moderate	Low	Does not apply
1. The effects of divorce on children.	47%	47%	6%	0
2. Communicating effectively with your children.	67%	27%	0	6%
3. Discipline with your children.	67%	27%	0	6%
4. Developing and promoting the faith of your children.	80%	20%	0	0
5. Handling parenting concerns with a former spouse.	40%	13%	27%	20%
6. Visitation issues with your children.	20%	33%	47%	0

Of the six areas of concern, three areas received "high priority" rankings from over sixty-five percent of the participants. Communicating with children, disciplining children, and promoting children's faith were issues that were very important to most of the group members. The effects of divorce on children was a category of great concern to the most recently divorced participants, with a high priority ranking of forty-seven percent. The issues of dealing with a former spouse and visitation received the lowest priority rankings. Most participants felt these issues decreased in urgency over time and were not high on their priority list.

The comments recorded in the interviews reflected the individual situations of the participants. One woman who has recently become a Christian was concerned about the reaction of her two teenaged children to her new faith. The single parents were concerned about the effects of their social life on their children. One noncustodial stepmother had questions about how to relate to the home situation of her two stepchildren. A custodial stepfather with a sixteen year old stepdaughter expressed his frustrations with parenting an adolescent. A final comment by the father of two preschool children was directed at the challenge of providing a proper education for today's children.

As a result of the interviews, it was determined that the majority of time during the ministry group would be devoted to these issues: the effects of divorce on children,

communication, faith development, and discipline. These four issues were assigned to be discussed in five of the ministry group sessions. One session was designed for a discussion of visitation issues and dealing with a former spouse. The remaining two sessions were the introductory session and the concluding session.

A Profile of the Participants

There were fifteen participants in the ministry group. Of the fifteen participants, six were single and nine were married. All of the married participants had been divorced except for one, a married woman whose only marriage was to a divorced man. The group was intentionally designed to include a mixture of single and married persons, biological parents and stepparents. This combination allowed the participants to hear a point of view from a variety of perspectives during group discussions.

A significant factor for the group members was the status of their child custody arrangements. The ministry group had two single fathers who had sole custody of their children, and one single father who was the primary conservator in a joint custody arrangement. All three of the single mothers in the group had custody of their children. Only one of the noncustodial parents had children who lived in another state. Two of the custodial parents had children who visited parents in another state. No other families in the group had visitation arrangements

involving significant distances.

Four women in the group were stepmothers and two men were stepfathers. The women were all in a noncustodial relationship with their stepchildren and the men were both in a custodial relationship with their stepchildren. The ages of the children of the participants ranged from infant to early adult, but all of the participants had at least one child under the age of eighteen. The total number of children belonging to the participants in the ministry group was twenty-three. Table 2 describes the group members.

Location, length, and format of the sessions

All eight sessions of the ministry group were held in the parlor of the First Baptist Church. The parlor is a large carpeted room on the same level as the sanctuary. It is furnished with couches and comfortable chairs, decorated with pictures on the walls and includes an ornamental fireplace. There is a large picture window that looks out over a field to the rear of the church. For the group sessions, the couches and chairs were pulled together to form a semi-circle. Curtains were pulled over the windows to the hall to provide the group with some privacy.

The group sessions began at seven o'clock on eight successive Monday evenings. At half-past eight, the sessions concluded. Two paid baby sitters were provided during the sessions at no charge to the participants. These baby sitters watched over the children of the

Table 2
Description of Ministry Group Participants

Participant	Marital Status	Sex	Children From Previous Marriage	Children From Current Marriage	Child Custody
1	single	M	son, age 3 daughter, age 5	none	joint
2	single	F	son, age 20 daughter, age 17	none	sole
3	single	F	son, age 4 months	none	sole
4a	remarried	M	son, age 11 son, age 14	none	visitation
4b	remarried	F	daughter, age 16	none	sole
5a	remarried	F	daughter, age 2	none	sole
5b	remarried	M	none		
6a	remarried	F	daughter, age 8 daughter, age 12	none	sole
6b	remarried	M	son, age 9 son, age 12	none	visitation
7a	remarried	M	daughter, age 13 son, age 19 son, age 22	son, age 8 daughter, age 11	visitation
7b	married once	F	none	son, age 8 daughter, age 11	none
8	single	F	son, age 14	none	sole
9	single	M	son, age 11	none	sole
10	single	M	daughter, age 4	none	sole
11a	remarried	F	none	none	none
11b*	remarried	M	son, age 12 daughter, age 6	none	visitation

*Group leader

participants in the nursery and recreation room of the church, depending on the ages of the children. A video cassette recorder and television set were provided for the children each week. Coffee was available at each session for the adult participants; and on three occasions, refreshments were provided by members of the group.

Beginning with the second session, group members were invited to arrive for the sessions fifteen minutes early. This provided a time for informal visiting among the group members. It also allowed the meetings to begin promptly at seven o'clock with the agenda for the evening. Each session began with a prayer by the group leader. A quick review of the previous session was followed by an introduction of the topic for the evening. A presentation by the group leader was followed by group discussion, either in small groups or the entire group. Role plays were utilized during two of the sessions to involve the group. The meetings ended with a summary of the evening and an outline of the topic to be discussed the following week.

Implementation of the Group

After each participant had been interviewed and given an opportunity to make comments or ask questions about the group, the final dates for the group sessions were established. A letter was sent to each participant at this time listing the final details of the group (Appendix C). Enclosed with the letter was a list of the names of the

participants to allow the members of the group to begin the process of becoming acquainted. The participants were invited to contact the group leader if they had any further questions about the group. Arrangements were then completed at the church for the beginning of the first session.

Session one: Introductions, Biblical Insight into Parenting

Participants were asked to wear name tags at the first session to help with introductions. Even though participants were all from First Baptist Church, they were not all acquainted with one another. Coffee and soft drinks were available when the participants arrived. They were encouraged to circulate around the room and greet each other informally. Those who had children with them were shown where the baby sitters were located.

Participants were then asked to find a seat and the session began with prayer. Participants were asked to share their names and their places of employment with the other group members. As a way of helping to reduce anxiety, participants were encouraged to volunteer when they wanted to share rather than each sharing in turn around the semi-circle. Introductory items of a more personal nature were reserved for the second session.

The purpose and goals of the group were then shared with the participants. These items were written on newsprint and placed on a stand in front of the group. The

purpose presented to the group was: "help parents affected by divorce become more effective as Christian parents." Three goals were presented and discussed: 1) improve parenting skills; 2) reduce anxiety about parenting; and 3) provide support for each other.

The pretests were then distributed to the participants. Following brief instructions, the members of the group were asked to complete the pretests (Appendix D). A short break followed the administration of the pretests.

When the group reassembled, a discussion was held concerning the four "ground rules" that had been established for the group process. These had been written on the newsprint pad. They were: 1) attend all sessions; 2) confidentially; 3) opportunity to share if you wish; and 4) no one put "on the spot." These rules were discussed until everyone was comfortable with them and accepted them as an important element of being a part of the ministry group.

The final introductory matter was an explanation of the group certificate. A framed certificate of recognition was shown to the participants as a motivational factor. They were told that at the completion of the ministry group, each participant would receive a certificate. This certificate would be a permanent record of their participation in this ministry group.

Bibles were distributed to the participants for the next portion of the session, entitled "Biblical insight into

parenting." Material from chapter two of this ministry research project was utilized to develop a biblical and theological foundation for the study of Christian parenting. Two Old Testament passages were studied. They were Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 127:3-5. From these passages the biblical viewpoint of children as gifts and blessings from God was established. The responsibility of Christians to care for their families was discussed as a part of the intention of 1 Timothy 5:8. The concept of Christian parents as stewards was introduced to the group at this point. As Christian parents affected by divorce, the group members were encouraged to accept the responsibilities of stewardship in the care of their own children or their stepchildren. The following five theological guidelines were put on the newsprint and explained: responsibility, commitment, faithfulness, caring, and self-giving love.

A time of group discussion allowed for questions and reactions to the presentation. Most group members could easily relate the material under consideration to their own situations. There was agreement about the need for responsibility when parenting children of divorce. The biblical model of parents as stewards was well received as an incentive to the group members to practice responsible and loving Christian parenting.

The session came to an end and participants were told of the topic for the next week. They were asked to think about their own situations and the effects of divorce

on their children.

Session Two: The Effects of Divorce on Children at Different Ages

Following prayer, the second session began with some sharing among the group to help the members build trust and learn more of the details they held in common. Each participant was asked to give the names and ages of their children and describe the custody and visitation arrangements for their children. If they were divorced, they were asked to tell how long they had been divorced, and if they were remarried, how long they had been married. Again, the participants were asked to share about themselves when they were ready instead of in turn.

To begin the discussion on the session's topic, the participants were asked to answer the question "What feelings do you think children have when their parents divorce?" The answers were recorded on newsprint. This list was compared to another newsprint list that had been previously prepared with words such as "denial, anger, guilt, and wishing."[1]

To put this discussion in context, three segments from Jill Krementz's book How It Feels When Parents Divorce were read to the group.[2] Each segment was written by a

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[1] Francine Spilke, What About the Children? (New York: Crown Publishers, 1979), pp. 14-21.

[2] Jill Krementz, How It Feels When Parents Divorce (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), pp. 71-111.

child whose parents were divorced. Next, a handout was given to the group members detailing the effects of divorce on children. These effects were divided into four sections according to the age of children, from age three through adolescence (Appendix E).

The group was then divided into three groups of five and asked to discuss this question: "How have you observed these characteristics in your children or stepchildren?" They were asked to discuss what they were able to do that successfully helped their children deal with the effects of divorce. Finally, each group was instructed to list an effect or effects from their handout and make a list of suggestions for helping children cope with that effect.

When the small groups were finished, they formed into the larger group to share their responses. Each group reported and their suggestions were recorded on newsprint. The group members discussed these issues until it was time to conclude the session. As the participants were leaving, they were given a handout summarizing the grief process. There was no time for discussion of this handout, but the material was considered an important aid for parents who want to help children deal with the grief of divorce (Appendix F).

Session Three: Effective Communication in the Christian Home

Before beginning with the scheduled topic, an

explanation of one of the handouts from the previous week was requested by the group. Following the opening prayer, this material was reviewed (Appendix E). The group members were then asked to share with the others some issues that were of concern to them as parents in regard to their children. The resulting discussion centered around the frustrations of child discipline, visitation, communication, and other common parenting issues. The interchange was lively and most participants became involved. This open forum discussion served as the final activity aimed at helping the group members become better acquainted. For the remainder of the sessions, the agendas focused on the topics under consideration.

To introduce the subject of communication, three general guidelines were listed on the newsprint pad: 1) there are many ways that we communicate; 2) our communication has many effects; and 3) be aware of how you are communicating in order to communicate effectively.

Participants were then asked to write their responses to the following situation:

> Your twelve-year-old came home from school, fixed a sandwich for himself, and left the kitchen in a shambles after you had spent an hour cleaning it up so that it would be clean when you started to get dinner.[3]

Participants were asked to write exactly what they would say to their children in this situation. They were then given

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[3] Thomas Gordon, Parent Effectiveness Training (New York: P. H. Wyden Co., 1970), p. 109.

a handout containing the descriptions of different kinds of messages (Appendix G). Group members were asked to compare their responses in the given situation to the messages described on the handout. A discussion followed on the way in which we send messages, and their appropriateness and effectiveness.

The group members were then introduced to a view of communicating as a process.[4] A diagram was written on the newsprint pad to illustrate this process. The process involves a "sender" who "encodes" and then "sends" a message, which is "decoded" by a "receiver." Discussion on this communication process was terminated due to the end of the session.

Session Four: Communication, and Creative Discipline

It had been determined from the pre-group interviews that a portion of session four would be devoted to the topic of communication. As the fourth session began, the explanation and discussion of the process of communication was resumed. The movement from sender to receiver was identified as the process in communication. The concept of "active listening" was then introduced. This was described as the "checking out" of messages by the receiver to assure the accuracy of the message sent by the sender. Participants were asked to give examples of how

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[4] Ibid., p. 49.

they might use active listening with their children. They shared situations in which the accuracy of communication would be increased through the utilization of active listening techniques.

The concept of "I" messages was introduced to the group as a means to express feelings and avoid blaming in interpersonal communication. Group members were encouraged to make statements beginning with "I" in order to speak about themselves and their own feelings.

The topic of communication was concluded with the discussion of a handout containing material from Stinnet and Defrain's Secrets of Strong Families (Appendix H). This discussion included guidelines for effective communication within families with comments on conflict management.

After a short break, the topic of discipline was introduced. There was high interest in this topic with active group participation in the discussions. To begin, the question was asked "What is a rule?" Group members were asked to discuss what it means to say that rules need to be definable, reasonable, and enforceable.[5] Group members were able to share personal experiences about their own children's reactions to household rules. The complications developing in a family where visitation occurs brought even more comments from the group. The time was quickly gone and

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[5] Judith M. Smith and Donald E. P. Smith, Child Management (Champaign, Illinois: Research Press, 1976), pp. 24-32.

the session came to an end for the evening. Group members were told to return the following week with thoughts about discipline in families affected by divorce.

Session Five: Creative Discipline

As session five began, the group members received a handout outlining some basic facts of child development (Appendix I). This information was intended to provide the context for the discussion on child discipline. A variety of different parenting styles were then presented. "Authoritarian," "permissive," and "authoritative" parenting styles were described and outlined on the newsprint pad.[6] A handout describing the principles of authoritative or democratic discipline was distributed and discussed (Appendix J).

The presentation then returned to the subject of rules and their enforcement in the home. Guidelines such as setting a time limit and ensuring that the task is carried out were suggested.[7] The group members discussed these ideas and shared their own experiences until it was time for a break.

After the break, the group was asked to participate in some experiential exercises to dramatize the material being considered. Volunteers were asked to share a

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[6] Michael Popkin, Active Parenting (Atlanta: Active Parenting, Inc., 1983), p. 47.

[7] Smith, pp. 33, 34.

discipline problem from their own families for a role play in the group. With a little encouraging, one participant was willing to share a situation from her family and two other participants came forward to play roles. Participants in the role play were asked to take a role unlike their actual situation. As a result, persons who were non-custodial parents played the role of custodial parents. Biological parents played the role of stepparents. The role play was kept to about three minutes in length, and the larger group debriefed the experience afterward.

At the conclusion of the discussion on the role play, it was time to conclude the session. The topic for the next session was announced as "Building faith in your family." The members of the group, however, voiced their feelings that they would like to continue with more role plays. After some negotiation, it was agreed to conduct more role plays during the next session, and to use the topics of dealing with a child's "other" parent and visitation in order to continue the focus on the relationships within families affected by divorce.

Session Six: Relationships With a Child's "Other" Parent, and Making the Most of Visitation

The purpose of session six was to introduce the material dealing with both the relationship between divorced parents and issues involving visitation, and encourage group members to participate in a variety of role plays. The

session began with some informal sharing over coffee, and the opening prayer.

A handout was used to begin the discussion on the given topics (Appendix K). The handout illustrated a "Family Responsibility Scale" developed by the group leader. The scale is intended to assist families in assessing their relationships. The scale shows a vertical continuum of what persons in families are responsible for, from "authority" to "cooperation." The diagrams to the right of the continuum illustrate healthy families with parents in positions of leadership and children accountable to their parents. Even though the relationships are changed after a divorce (indicated by a broken line on the handout), healthy families maintain clear parental authority. Problems occur in families when children become responsible for inappropriate levels of leadership. Divorced parents can bring this about when they refuse to maintain their leadership roles which causes children to be responsible for too much authority. Communication and mutual understanding on the part of divorced parents is vital. The members of the group were encouraged to diagram their family patterns on the newsprint pad. Discussion centered on how families become unbalanced in their responsibilities and how a proper order can be restored.

A second handout outlined guidelines for divorced parents and suggestions for making the most of visitation (Appendix L). The group read through the twelve guidelines

and group members shared their reactions as reflected in their own experiences.

After a break, the group members were asked to participate in more role plays. As in the previous session, persons were asked to share an actual issue from their families for the role plays. Role play participants volunteered and were assigned roles that were different from their actual situations. Following each role play, the larger group discussed how the situation could have been handled in a different way for different results. Group members were urged to view the situations from the perspective of Christian parents practicing stewardship in the care of their children. Discussion was animated with each of the group members becoming involved.

When it was time to close the session, the group debriefed the evening. There was a feeling of closeness that had developed among the group members as they shared their experiences and tried to lend support to one another. The topic of "Building faith in your family" was announced as the topic for the next week, and the session ended.

Session Seven: Building Faith in Your Family

As session seven began, the group's attention was focused on the winter/spring, 1990, special edition of Newsweek magazine. The title of the edition is "The Twenty-First Century Family," with the emphasis on how changes in the family are causing our society to change its view of the

family. The point was made that families such as the ones represented in our ministry group are increasing in number and influence. For the participants, persons who often find themselves wondering where they fit, especially in the church, it was significant to realize that they are no longer families with problems no one wants to try and understand and help.

To help the group focus on the topic of faith development, a handout was distributed that outlined the stages one goes through in the development of mature Christian faith. The handout also included guidelines for sharing one's faith with children (Appendix M). A discussion followed the presentation of this material centering on the variety of approaches needed to instruct children of different ages about Christianity.

Further material was presented on ways to help children learn about faith at home. Ideas for the use of music, prayer, Bible study, and home worship with children of different ages were shared.[8]

After a short break, the participants were formed into small groups and asked to discuss two questions relating to the information covered earlier in the session. The small groups were given the following questions: "How can you follow the 'Guidelines for Sharing Your Faith With Your Children' in your family?", and "What are some

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[8] Evelyn Blitchington, The Family Devotions Idea Book (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1982), pp. 67-118.

practical ideas that you have used or could use to help your children grow in the Christian faith?"

The small groups were given time for discussion, and then all returned to the larger group. Ideas were shared by each small group and recorded on newsprint. Some of the ideas suggested were family devotional times, family service projects, bedtime devotionals, allowing children to participate in prayers and Bible reading, and the importance of finding and making time to give to the spiritual guidance of children.

The time had expired for session seven. Participants were congratulated for reaching the final session of the group experience, and were dismissed.

Session Eight: The Challenge of Christian Parenting, Evaluation and Conclusion

A few special measures were included in session eight since it was the conclusion to the ministry group experience. Two tables were added to the meeting room for the display of sample resources for parents affected by divorce. Also available on the tables were copies of each of the handouts used during the group sessions. Participants had volunteered to bring pastries and other refreshments. One of the baby sitters brought a cake to share with the children.

Following the opening prayer, the final ministry group session began with a summary of the material covered

in all of the previous sessions. The newsprint pad was utilized by displaying pages containing information discussed in each session. The handouts were mentioned and participants were urged to take and keep any they did not have.

Next, blank pieces of paper were distributed for an exercise in self-assessment. It was explained that this kind of assessment and awareness would help promote personal growth and improvement. Participants were asked to consider the completed agenda of the ministry group and list areas they felt were their personal areas of strength and areas needing improvement. All members were asked to share their responses with the larger group in the discussion which followed.

Once everyone had shared, a selection was read from Westerhoff's Bringing Up Children In the Christian Faith.[9] The point being made was the fact that Christian parents are called by God to care for their children and to teach them the tenets of the Christian faith. The author admitted parenting is not easy, but pointed to the inspiration and encouragement given by God in the fulfillment of this high calling. This point underscored for the group the identity of Christian parents as stewards, called to the responsible and loving care of their children.

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[9] John H. Westerhoff, III, Bringing Up Children in the Christian Faith (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980), pp. 7-12.

refreshments and look over the books on the resource table. When the group reconvened, the idea of future activities was introduced. It was suggested that members of the group agree to future informal meetings for fellowship and support. Activities were suggested that were aimed at both parents alone and parents with their children. The group members showed interest in a continuation of the group in some form. Two of the participants were delegated to coordinate future plans. Their assignment was to notify the other group members of a possible meeting or event and provide leadership to the other group members in the planning process.

The posttests (Appendix D) were then distributed to the participants, along with the evaluations (Appendix N). Following brief instructions, the members of the group completed these questionnaires.

Once the completed posttests and evaluations had been collected, certificates were presented to the members of the group in recognition of their successful completion of the ministry group. After the participants had received their certificates, a group picture was taken.

To conclude the eight-week group, the participants were asked to form a circle and join hands. The closing prayer, shared by anyone in the group who wished to pray aloud, was of gratitude for friendship and support, and for God's continued guidance. The group was then dismissed.

Chapter 4

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The project participants helped evaluate the ministry group by completing three questionnaires. A pretest was administered during the first session of the group and a posttest was completed during the final session. In addition, each member supplied answers to the questions of a final evaluation pertaining to the group experience. This chapter will describe the formulation and results of the pretest and posttest and the results of the final evaluation. The chapter will conclude with a summary of these results.

Pretest and Posttest

The pretest and posttest (Appendix D) were designed to help provide data on the effectiveness of the ministry group with parents affected by divorce. The tests were identical and measured changes in the attitudes and opinions of the participants before and after the ministry group.

Formulation of the Questionnaire

The intent of the questionnaire was to help in determining how effectively two of the goals of the project were achieved. These two goals, stated as goal number

three and four in chapter one of this ministry research project, were: "help participants improve their parenting skills" and "address any debilitating anxiety experienced by participants concerning their parenting responsibilities."

To achieve goal number three, information was shared and discussed with the participants in six areas determined to be of concern to parents in families affected by divorce. Statements were developed for the questionnaire in each of these areas to assess the participants' knowledge and awareness. A Likert response scale was chosen for the questionnaire. This scale offered participants the opportunity to respond with an opinion ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with the inclusion of an "uncertain" response. This form was selected rather than other structures such as multiple choice, true-false, or sentence completion because of its less intimidating nature. Participants were asked to give their honest opinions with instructions that there were no "wrong answers" rather than being asked to give correct answers to a list of questions. The encouragement to respond to questionnaire items with honest opinions was intended to help participants avoid some of the feelings of worry and anxiety often accompanying an academic exam. A relaxed frame of mind was considered important.

Care was taken to word the statements in such a way that an "agree" response was not always positive and a "disagree" response was not always negative. Participants

were asked to read each statement carefully before they gave their opinions. In this way, participants were discouraged from thinking of only the "agree" responses as the "correct" responses.

Since goal number four addressed a subjective feeling rather than an objective set of facts, a different form was utilized for measurement. The semantic differential was chosen because it provided a way to quantify the attitudes of the participants. Five concepts important to parents in families affected by divorce were chosen, and six pairs of adjectives were listed below each concept. "Anxiety" and "confidence" were included as a way of assessing the success of goal number four. Under each concept word, the adjective pairs were listed in different vertical and horizontal order to encourage participants to think carefully about their responses to each item. The adjective scales were listed consecutively for the convenience of the participants.

Report and Analysis of the Data

Fifteen persons were included in the ministry group. Participants were urged to attend every meeting. One person was unable to be present for two of the sessions. A comparison of the scores from her pretest and posttest with the scores of the other participants revealed a relatively small difference. Her responses to the pretest paralleled the responses of the majority of the other participants

on twenty-three of the thirty statements. On the posttest, her responses matched the responses of the majority of the participants attending all of the sessions on twenty-six of the thirty statements. This similarity can possibly be attributed to the effect of the group discussions held each week covering material from preceding sessions. Since the design of this ministry project, however, is to compare pretest and posttest results from participants attending all sessions, the scores for the participant attending only six sessions are not included in the following analysis. The results will be based on the pretests and posttests of fourteen participants.

The effects of divorce on children. Session two of the ministry group focused on the effects of divorce on children of different ages. Information was shared describing how children respond to the divorce of their parents, and how during different stages of development children react in different ways to family stress. Responses to the posttest revealed an increase in awareness on the part of the participants in regard to the perseverance of low self-esteem and the sources of anger in children of divorce. The posttest also demonstrated an increase in the participants' understanding of the importance of consistent contact with their children following a divorce. The posttest revealed that the parents in the group modified their beliefs about the harmful

effects of divorce on children. The posttest showed their beliefs after the sessions to indicate that divorce does not automatically and unavoidably cause harm to children. The data for statements on this topic are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Responses to Pretest and Posttest Statements One, Two, Four, Eight, Nine, and Twenty-One

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Divorce always produces harmful psychological reactions in children.	7%	7%	21%	14%	28%	7%	36%	64%	7%	7%
2. A poor self-concept formed in childhood has a tendency to improve in adulthood.	0%	0%	7%	7%	21%	7%	50%	50%	21%	36%
4. Following divorce, children usually feel abandoned which makes them feel angry.	14%	7%	71%	93%	0%	0%	14%	0%	0%	0%
8. Because children are so resilient, I should not let myself become too concerned with a child's reaction to divorce.	0%	0%	0%	7%	7%	0%	57%	43%	36%	50%
9. A child whose absent parent maintains a good, consistent relationship with his/her custodial parent may be spared from unhealthy reactions to a divorce.	14%	43%	64%	57%	14%	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%
21. Children need to enjoy close relationships with both of their natural parents following a divorce.	28%	71%	50%	21%	14%	7%	7%	0%	0%	0%

Effective communication. "Effective Communication in the Christian Home" was the topic of session three. Participants were introduced to some basic concepts of

communication and encouraged to utilize them in their relationships with their children. According to the responses on the posttest, the participants increased their understanding of the importance of expressing feelings when communicating, but they did not indicate significant changes in actual practice. The posttest did reveal that the participants were trying to be more aware of feelings when communicating. The data for statements on communication are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of Responses to Pretest and Posttest Statements Ten, Seventeen, Nineteen, Twenty-Three, and Twenty-Four

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
10. Telling my child how I feel is difficult for me.	0%	0%	21%	21%	21%	21%	28%	36%	28%	21%
17. "I" messages are a basic requirement for close communication.	7%	28%	28%	57%	43%	7%	14%	7%	7%	0%
19. Children find it easy to express their angry feelings about the divorce of their parents.	7%	7%	7%	14%	28%	14%	36%	36%	21%	28%
23. It is important for a child to see his/her parents as completely adequate.	0%	21%	36%	21%	36%	7%	28%	50%	0%	0%
24. As a listener, I listen for both the words and feelings that are being expressed.	14%	43%	50%	43%	21%	7%	14%	7%	0%	0%

The responses on the posttest also showed an increase in understanding of what "I" messages are and

how important they are in personal communication. Parents' responses to the posttest changed from the pretest in regard to their beliefs about what images they needed to communicate to their children. There was an increase of twenty-two percent in the responses of those who felt it was unnecessary to cultivate images of being perfect with their children. This shift indicates an increase of the acceptance of honesty about one's own limitations as a more productive basis for communication.

Creative discipline. The subject of child discipline created a great deal of interest during the ministry group. Participants were very willing to enter into discussion on this topic. The results of the posttest, however, indicated a definite reluctance on the part of the participants to change many attitudes. Posttest results demonstrated little change from the pretest on statements relating to punishment, rules, and limits.

There were two statements in this area that did show a shift in responses between the pretest and the posttest. One of these statements related to the discipline of stepchildren. The results of the posttest showed parents in the group to be more willing to use the same disciplinary measures with both stepchildren and their own children following the group experience than they were before the group began. The other statement pertained to the practical application of discipline in the home (statement

twenty-seven). Even though the total number of both "disagree" and "strongly disagree" statements were the same in the pretest and posttest for statement twenty-seven, there was an increase of twenty-two percent of the parents who strongly disagreed in the posttest. These parents indicated by their responses that they were more willing to utilize disciplinary methods with their children and stepchildren than they were prior to their participation in the group. The results of the pretest and posttest statements on discipline are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5
Summary of Responses to Pretest and Posttest Statements Three, Fourteen, Eighteen, Twenty-Two, and Twenty-Seven

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
3. Discipline and punishment are pretty much the same thing.	0%	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	43%	50%
14. Children should not be included in making rules and in deciding ahead of time on possible consequences for breaking them.	0%	0%	0%	0%	7%	7%	57%	50%	36%	43%
18. Parents should utilize the same disciplinary measures with stepchildren as they would with their own children.	28%	50%	57%	43%	7%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%
22. It is not a good idea to give children both clear limits and independence in matters of discipline.	0%	0%	28%	21%	21%	21%	43%	50%	7%	7%
27. I view discipline in our home as something I would rather not have to deal with.	0%	0%	14%	7%	7%	14%	64%	43%	14%	36%

During the group presentations, discussions, and role plays covering the subject of discipline, the members of the group were often in disagreement about proper disciplinary measures. Some parents favored certain disciplinary methods considered improper by others. This diversity of opinion provided lively group discussion, but the indications from the posttests do not demonstrate significant shifts in positions concerning specific disciplinary methods on the part of the participants. Most members ended their ministry group experience with opinions about discipline very similar to when they began. The nature of this topic suggests that parents enjoy and need opportunities for discussion, but are not easily convinced to make changes in the way they discipline their children.

Building faith in your family. The subject of the Bible and parenting was discussed with the group at the very first session. During session seven, the focus was on creative ways to teach Christianity to children and to nurture them in their faith. Table 6 summarizes the pretest and posttest responses to statements relating to this important subject.

The results of the posttest showed a small negative change in the number of parents who felt they could easily share their faith with their children. There was also a small negative change in the responses concerning the communication of Christian values. During the ministry

group, the parents were challenged to examine their own Christian beliefs in order to share them with their children. It was emphasized that the process leading to effective sharing is complex and difficult. These results could possibly indicate an increase in understanding on the part of the participants concerning this aspect of their own faiths.

Table 6

Summary of Responses to Pretest and Posttest Statements Seven, Eleven, Sixteen, and Twenty-Eight

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
7. My Christian faith is something I can share easily with my children.	21%	14%	57%	57%	21%	14%	0%	14%	0%	0%
11. I am often at a loss for ways to help my child understand and accept Christian values.	0%	0%	36%	43%	7%	21%	43%	36%	14%	0%
16. The New Testament teaches that mothering provides a woman with inherent honor.	7%	14%	21%	36%	50%	21%	14%	14%	7%	14%
28. In the Old Testament, disobedient children are considered a curse from God.	0%	0%	0%	21%	50%	28%	21%	43%	28%	7%

Two statements were included on the pretest and posttest concerning biblical teachings on parenting. The responses showed no clear awareness of these biblical teachings on the part of the participants either before or after the group. A more concentrated approach may be

necessary to make the biblical material on parenting more clearly understood by the participants.

Relationships with a child's "other" parent. This issue is important for divorced parents because of the direct effect it has on their children. The responses to these statements are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Summary of Responses to Pretest and Posttest Statements Five, Twelve, Fifteen, Twenty-Five, and Thirty

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
5. Because of the nature of divorce, trust is something divorced parents can never rebuild.	7%	7%	7%	14%	28%	14%	36%	36%	21%	28%
12. Teaching children to respect individual differences should include the practice of compromise on the part of divorced parents.	14%	36%	71%	57%	7%	7%	7%	0%	0%	0%
15. Prolonged parental conflict seriously undermines children's security and trust in their parents, in themselves, and in their own futures.	50%	79%	43%	21%	0%	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%
25. It is not healthy for children to be protected from parental conflict following a divorce.	0%	0%	0%	21%	28%	21%	71%	57%	0%	0%
30. Children usually ignore the derogatory remarks their divorced parents make about one another.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	36%	36%	64%	64%

Responses to the posttest revealed a slight increase in the willingness of the participants to rebuild

trust following a divorce. Parents agreed equally on the pretest and posttest regarding the statement that children are very aware of what is happening between their parents when a divorce occurs. A larger increase in responses was recorded for the benefits of compromise and the reduction of conflict when dealing with former spouses. Participants also showed an increased willingness to accept the conflict following a divorce as something to be dealt with openly rather than denied.

Visitation. Part of session six was devoted to a discussion of how to make the most of visitation. Several of the posttest statements in this area registered significant changes from the responses to the pretest. The majority of participants responded on the posttest that frequent visitations are preferable to a few long visits, a balance of pleasant and unpleasant activities should be provided to children while visiting, and it is best to ignore the late arrival of a visiting parent when it happens infrequently. The parents showed a slight increase in their agreement that children should be asked to do homework and chores when visiting. The posttest revealed there were slightly fewer participants than on the pretest who felt that remarriage significantly affected visitation. Single parents contemplating remarriage during the ministry group possibly hoped that there would be little effect to their children and were unconvinced by the group

presentations and discussions. The data for this topic are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Summary of Responses to Pretest and Posttest Statements Six, Thirteen, Twenty, Twenty-Six, and Twenty-nine

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
6. Shorter, more frequent visitations are preferable to fewer, longer ones.	7%	57%	50%	43%	28%	0%	21%	0%	0%	0%
13. The best atmosphere a visiting parent can provide the children is one that maintains a balance between pleasant and unpleasant activities.	7%	43%	50%	50%	14%	0%	28%	7%	0%	0%
20. When visiting with non-custodial parents, children should not be asked to do homework and chores.	0%	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%	57%	43%	36%	57%
26. If a visiting parent is a few minutes late once in a while, it is best to ignore it.	0%	36%	86%	57%	0%	0%	14%	7%	0%	0%
29. Remarriage of a parent has little effect on visitation.	0%	7%	7%	7%	0%	7%	71%	43%	21%	36%

Building confidence as parents. During each session of the ministry group there was time for sharing and mutual support. Whether in small groups or with the larger group, members were encouraged to listen for ideas or approaches that could be applied directly to their own situations. Participants were asked to use actual episodes from their families when role plays were used. Christian parenting was always described as a challenging endeavor requiring

the utilization of many resources to be successful. With the presence of single parents and stepparents in the group, special care was taken to discuss parenting from a wide variety of perspectives. The intention of this focus on interpersonal issues was to foster healthy, confident attitudes about parents and parenting in the aftermath of divorce.

Five concepts were used in a semantic differential testing instrument to measure the effectiveness of the ministry group in this area. The evaluation, potency, and activity dimensions of each concept were measured by six adjective pairs. The responses from both the pretests and posttests are presented in Table 9.

Responses to the semantic differential revealed a wide range of attitudes related to the concepts tested. There were three scales in three different concepts displaying no change between the pretest and the posttest. All other concepts on all adjective scales showed a change in responses between the pretest and the posttest.

No concepts registered all negative changes in the six scales on the posttest. One concept, "stepparent", registered positive changes in all six scales. The emphasis on the important role of stepparents seems to have helped the participants improve their overall attitude toward stepparenting. There were seven stepparents participating in the ministry group, and the scores in this area represent a hope for improved parent-child relations.

Table 9

Summary of Responses to Pretest and Posttest, Part One
Items One, Two, Three, Four, and Five

	Good Bad	Strong Weak	Beautiful Ugly	Confident Anxious	Friendly Angry	Active Passive
1. Marriage						
Pre	2.5	2.3	1.9	1.9	0.8	2.0
Post	2.2	1.9	1.8	1.9	1.4	2.1
2. Divorce						
Pre	-1.9	0.1	-2.4	-0.6	-1.8	-0.1
Post	-1.6	-0.1	-2.0	0.1	-0.9	-0.4
3. Parenting						
Pre	2.5	1.8	1.9	0.2	1.9	2.4
Post	2.2	1.8	2.1	0.9	2.0	2.1
4. Stepparent						
Pre	0.9	0.3	0.5	-0.9	1.3	0.4
Post	1.0	0.6	0.9	0.1	1.4	0.5
5. Stepchild						
Pre	1.3	1.3	1.5	-0.1	1.3	1.4
Post	1.3	1.2	1.3	0.1	1.4	1.1

A significant component of this measurement was how the group members responded to the adjective pair "anxious-confident." This scale was intentionally used to record differences in levels of anxiety in order to determine if the group experience helped build confidence among the participants. The "anxious-confident" scale demonstrated no negative changes between pretest and posttest scores for all five concepts. The highest change for the "anxious-confident" scale was for the concept "stepparent." The lowest change for this scale was for the concept "marriage."

of the participants in regard to their parenting responsibilities following a divorce. The evidence suggests that the relationships developed during the ministry group and the mutual support provided by the experience helped increase the positive attitudes of confidence among the participants.

Even though the scores on the posttest improved in the area of confidence, they did not improve in all areas. The scale for "friendly-angry" was the only scale registering positive changes for all five concepts. The scales for "strong-weak" and "active-passive" showed negative differences in three out of five concepts. The "beautiful-ugly" and "good-bad" scales showed negative differences in two out of five concepts. These results are possibly due to the personal nature of the ministry project. During the ministry group, members shared with each other the details of their own lives and identities as divorced parents. For some of the participants, divorce was something that has been in the past for many years. In bringing back some of the memories of the effects of divorce on their children, and in considering possible solutions to problems that have existed for some time, negative feelings were generated. These feelings are represented in the negative responses to the semantic differential. The data emphasize the importance of awareness and sensitivity to the needs of members of a group dealing with such emotional issues as divorce and parenting.

Final Evaluation

After completing the posttest during the final ministry group session, participants were asked to give their responses to a group evaluation (Appendix N). All fifteen participants completed an evaluation. The form asked group members to rate the group experience in three specific areas: content, process, and group leader.

Session Content

The group evaluation asked participants to rate seven session topics as "very helpful," "helpful," "average," or "not helpful." Statements four through ten pertained to these areas. The responses from the group members are presented in Table 10.

The areas of session content given priority attention all received high rankings in the evaluation. "Biblical insight into parenting" received "helpful" or "very helpful" responses from eighty-seven percent of the group members. The topics of communication, discipline, and faith building received "helpful" or "very helpful" responses from ninety-three percent of the members. "The effects of divorce on children" received responses in the "helpful" range from all participants. The session combining the topics of dealing with a child's "other" parent and visitation received the lowest rankings of all topics. The topic of visitation received "helpful" or "very helpful" responses from sixty-seven percent of the participants.

Table 10

Summary of Group Evaluation Statements Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, and Ten

	Very Helpful	Helpful	Average	Not Helpful
4. Biblical insight into parenting.	40%	47%	13%	0%
5. The effects of divorce on children at different ages.	40%	60%	0%	0%
6. Effective communication in the Christian home.	53%	40%	7%	0%
7. Creative discipline with your child.	53%	40%	7%	0%
8. Building faith in your family.	53%	67%	7%	0%
9. Relationships with a child's "other" parent.	13%	33%	40%	13%
10. Making the most of visitation.	20%	47%	33%	0%

These data reveal a high number of responses in the "helpful" range of the group evaluation. Compared to all possible responses, thirty-five percent were "very helpful," forty-eight percent were "helpful," fifteen percent were "average," and less than one percent were "not helpful." A total of eighty-three percent of the responses were in the "helpful" range. These results indicate the participants were mostly satisfied with the content of the group sessions.

Process

Three items on the group evaluation related to the structure and process of the ministry group. Statement twelve related to the church parlor, the room chosen for the ministry group. Sixty-seven percent of the responses were "very satisfactory" and thirty-three percent were "satisfactory." The church parlor is not used for many meetings at the First Baptist Church. The satisfactory rating from this evaluation indicates that perhaps it should be utilized more often for group meetings. The responses for all three of these statements are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Summary of Group Evaluation Statements Twelve, Thirteen, and Fourteen

	Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Very Unsatisfactory
12.	Room comfort.			
	67%	33%	0%	0%
13.	Length of weekly sessions.			
	13%	80%	7%	0%
14.	Number of weekly sessions.			
	13%	87%	0%	0%

There was an "unsatisfactory" response to statement thirteen concerning the length of weekly sessions. Based on the comments given by the participants in the group sessions, the time was too short for the amount of material covered in each session. In regard to the number of weekly

sessions, eight sessions seemed to be a time frame suitable for the busy parents in the group.

Leader

The participants were asked to give their reactions to the group leader in statements fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen. These statements and the responses are presented in Table 12.

Table 12

Summary of Group Evaluation Statements
Fifteen, Sixteen, and Seventeen

	Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Very Unsatisfactory
15.	Preparation of group leader.			
	87%	13%	0%	0%
16.	Presentations made by group leader.			
	60%	40%	0%	0%
17.	Overall performance of group leader.			
	80%	20%	0%	0%

Thirteen of the participants, representing eighty-seven percent, were very satisfied with the preparation of the group leader as indicated in statement fifteen. The responses also indicate the satisfaction of the group members with the overall performance of the group leader. When asked to respond in statement sixteen to the presentations made by the leader, sixty percent were very satisfied, compared to responses above eighty percent in the

other statements in this category. A possible explanation for this difference in "very satisfactory" responses is the excessive length of some of the presentations. More time could have been provided for group interaction had some presentations been shortened.

Overall Evaluation

Statement one in the group evaluation asked the participants to rank their overall reaction to the ministry group. Eleven responded "very favorable," and four responded "favorable." There were no "unfavorable" or "very unfavorable" responses. With seventy-three percent of the group members responding with the highest ranking, it is evident the ministry group was well received by the group members. The enthusiasm displayed by the participants during group sessions also leads to this conclusion.

Statements two and three asked participants to complete these sentences: 2) "What I liked most about this group was:," and 3) "What I liked least about this group was:." The responses given for each of these statements are presented in Appendix O.

There were a total of nineteen responses to statement two, since some group members had several comments. The most common response was an appreciation for the sharing of feelings and ideas among the members of the ministry group. One participant responded "the closeness that developed in the group and finding out that other

parents had many of the same problems you do." Thirteen responses (sixty-eight percent) described the sharing of common experiences as the component they liked best about the group. Another participant wrote "the widely varied home situations from which we all come helped gain a better perspective." Three group members commented on the relationships developed during the group experience. One participant described the feeling of closeness by writing "it was very easy to participate in this group. It became more like family." Other responses referred to the openness of the group, the opportunity to learn more about Christian parenting, and the organization of the material. Based upon these responses, the support aspect of the ministry group was well received, and will be utilized to promote future activities for the group members.

Fourteen responses were submitted for statement three. The subject of the response given most often was the amount of time allocated for presentations and group discussions during the sessions. "Too little time," "not enough discussion time," and "needed more time for some topics" represent these responses. There were six responses (forty-three percent) of this kind. Two responses stated there was not enough time for sharing, one response stated there was too much lecture. Although two responses stated a dislike of the use of the role plays, one response stated more role plays were needed. It is evident from these responses participants needed more time to

interact with each other. Adjusting the ratio of presentation to discussion to allow more time for group discussion would enhance the benefits derived from the ministry group. Limiting the amount of material presented in an eight week format could help allow for this adjustment.

Summary

The posttest results revealed increases in the awareness of some important factors for parents affected by divorce. Participants indicated a greater awareness of the effects of divorce on children, the need for self-awareness and openness in communication, and the benefits to children of the use of compromise and conflict reduction when dealing with former spouses. The posttest results indicated parents were more willing to discipline their children and incorporate household duties into the schedule for visiting children due to the ministry group experience. The posttest results also demonstrated a positive change in the amount of confidence participants felt about their parenting tasks.

The results of the posttest, however, showed little change in regard to other parental responsibilities. Participants indicated little openness towards changing their established disciplinary methods. The members of the group did not show an increased willingness to share their faith with their children. When responding to statements concerning their ability to share their feelings with their

children, the participants indicated that the ministry group did not have a great effect.

The data from the group evaluation showed clearly that the members of the ministry group had a positive experience. The responses from the participants revealed favorable reactions to the relational aspect of the group experience and gratitude for the opportunity for interchange with other parents affected by divorce. The implications of these conclusions for future ministry with other parents affected by divorce will be the focus for the concluding chapter of this ministry research project.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Planning and implementing a ministry group with parents affected by divorce has provided many opportunities for learning. The process has utilized common knowledge and established procedures as well as many new ideas and structures. This chapter will describe the implications of the project for ministry with parents affected by divorce and for congregational ministry in general. Conclusions about research and the one conducting the research will also be described. The chapter will conclude with some suggestions for future ministry with parents affected by divorce.

Implications of the Project

There were many implications resulting from this ministry project. The conclusions gathered from the project relate to a wide range of ministry concerns.

Ministry with Parents Affected by Divorce

When contacted about involvement in a ministry group for divorced parents, the majority of the members of our congregation who qualified were eager to participate. Divorced persons sometimes become suspicious of the church

when the church appears as a place of judgement and condemnation. Many Christians who are divorced feel a sense of failure and shame before God. When the church magnifies the guilt associated with divorce, the church often becomes a place to be avoided.

This ministry group intentionally sent a message of affirmation and support to the potential members. Divorce itself was not condoned, but it was clear from the beginning of the group process that forgiveness and healing were important themes. Help and support with the difficult tasks of parenting were offered enthusiastically.

The response to this approach was rewarding. The participants were grateful for a place to gather with other Christians to deal with their unique parenting situations. The church became for these parents a place for sharing and caring and growth.

I was very pleased with this reaction. I felt from the beginning that the church was a place for programs aimed at supporting families, even non-traditional families. I learned that other parents affected by divorce, like myself, are open to ministry programs designed to help them grow in their faith and improve their performance as parents.

Congregational Ministry

Even though the ministry group was a part of my doctoral program, it was incorporated thoroughly into the

ministry of the First Baptist Church of Lima. The Board of Christian Education approved and sponsored the ministry group as an outreach to parents in our congregation. Only members of the congregation were invited to attend, and reports about the progress and results of the group were given to the church in business meetings and other church functions.

In order to minimize any possibility of controversy about the group, plans were discussed with church leaders well in advance of its implementation. The focus on parents and parenting was stressed as an integral part of the ministry to families within our congregation.

There were no complaints from the congregation about the nature of the ministry group before, during, or after the sessions. The general response was one of support for the idea of providing a ministry to parents of any kind, divorced or otherwise.

I learned that when ministry is sincere in its attempt to meet actual needs, congregational support is possible, even in the face of controversy. I also learned the importance of communication within the congregation about the purpose and nature of ministry programs.

Congregational Research

The members of the ministry group were asked to submit to a structured interview before the group began. They completed a pretest during the first session and then a

posttest at the completion of the group experience. There was more than a little apprehension concerning some of these research procedures on the part of the participants. They did not seem accustomed to being tested in any way at church. It seemed intimidating at first. With my encouragement, the group members were persuaded to cooperate with the research. A cautious attitude continued to prevail, however.

I learned that people are not necessarily open to a great deal of accountability in regard to their involvement at church. The nature of the church as a voluntary organization seems to translate to some church members that what they do when they are at church is not open for scrutiny by others. The research techniques used in this ministry project represented somewhat of an invasion of this privacy. "What I do at church is between me and God" characterizes this attitude. Congregational research, therefore, in the form of questionnaires and interviews, can be threatening. I learned to use a sensitive and careful approach when asking for cooperation with research.

The ministry of the church, however, can benefit greatly from the lessons of congregational research. I learned that research is not easily done in a church setting, but it is very helpful in determining the effectiveness of ministry. Gathering information and analyzing data needs to be a regular part, in some form, of the life of a healthy congregation.

Project Writer

As the writer of this project, I made many discoveries about myself and about the subject of this project during its development and implementation. For one thing, I learned that I have a tendency toward control. In the weekly ministry group sessions, I constantly fought the desire to insist on my own agenda when the group was trying to go in a different direction. I was reluctant to allow the group to set its own agenda even when I thought it might be the best thing for the group. The group would have been able to discuss some of the issues in more depth if they had been given the opportunity. If I lead these sessions again, I will allow more time in the schedule for this kind of personal sharing in the group.

I learned that I sometimes had unrealistic expectations of what could be accomplished in a group session. The comments from some group members concerning not enough discussion and too much lecture in the group sessions relates to this issue. There were so many quality resources and helpful ideas and concepts for some of the topics that I would prepare too much material for the time available. In the future I will limit the amount of material so that there will be sufficient time for adequate presentations without the need to hurry.

I learned that I was effective in leading the group to consider some of the sensitive issues covered in the meetings. I was able to establish rapport with the

members of the group and help them become comfortable in relating to the other members. I was hoping to be able to create an open and caring environment for the group, and I feel I succeeded.

Finally, I learned again how much I enjoy helping people discover the joy that comes as we feel God working in our lives to bring us new possibilities and challenges. It was exciting to see the relationships grow among group members and feel the trust developing within the group. As participants found the courage to ask difficult questions and share personal feelings, I experienced a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment. As I witnessed the biblical principles of love, compassion, and forgiveness being incarnated in a group of Christians seeking God's will, I felt my call to ministry reaffirmed; I received encouragement for my own walk of faith.

Suggestions for Future Ministry

Ministry with parents affected by divorce needs to continue as a part of the church's ministry to families in the future. The results of this project suggest that consideration needs to be given to the proper balance of content presentation and group discussion. The issues involved in stepfamilies and single parent families necessitate ample time for discussion and the sharing of feelings and experiences.

Divorce is a devastating event in the life of an

individual. The biblical teaching on marriage stresses its permanency and the need for a strong commitment to family. Divorce does occur, however, to Christians in our churches. When these persons are parents the trauma is compounded. Single parents, remarried parents, and stepparents wanting to be effective Christians in their families need the support and guidance of the church. Ministry groups within the church, such as the one developed for this project, is one way to provide such support.

The format used for this project, however, could be adapted to a variety of settings and purposes. A retreat focusing on only a few selected topics could provide parents with an opportunity to receive the benefits of the fellowship and material without the extended time of an eight-week group. An elective Sunday School class could be offered in a church and the material expanded to a thirteen week course on Christian parenting in non-traditional families.

The need for the exchange of information and the sharing of experiences among parents affected by divorce indicates the potential usefulness of a ministry group for the purpose of mutual support and encouragement without a focus on topic presentations. Actual situations could be shared within the group with interaction providing positive input and possible solutions to issues of concern.

Whatever form ministry takes, it needs to be extended to families dealing with the complexities of

parenting following a divorce. These Christian parents are recipients of the grace of God, and need encouragement and leadership in their sincere efforts to raise their children in a way pleasing to God.

Guidelines for Those Ministering With Families Affected by Divorce

During the development and implementation of the ministry group, important lessons were learned concerning congregational ministry with families affected by divorce. The following guidelines have been formulated from the ministry group experience. These guidelines are intended to help pastors, ministers of Christian education, youth ministers, and other church leaders relate more effectively to these special families.

Effects of Divorce on Parents and Children

Persons who are divorced must deal with a wide variety of emotions and states of being when parenting their children. The parents involved in this ministry group articulated the following dynamics:

Guilt
Grief
Anger
Anxiety
Fatigue
Doubt
Hope
Determination
Patience
Relief

These feelings and states of being were stronger for some of

the parents than others, depending on their individual circumstances. These dynamics were present in some degree, however, for all of the parents who had been divorced.

The participants also described the feelings and states of being of their children, whose ages ranged from pre-school to young adult. These dynamics included:

Grief
Guilt
Anger
Rejection
Lack of trust
Denial
Conflicting loyalties
Fantasies of parental reconciliation
Shaken sense of identity
Changed perception of parents

For a more complete list of the effects of divorce on children, see Appendix E on page ninety-nine.

Ministry With Families Affected by Divorce

When dealing with family members affected by divorce, the church needs to respond with compassion and intentionality. Affirmation, support, and acceptance can help lead to spiritual and emotional healing in families affected by divorce. A sense of caring and an understanding of forgiveness gives guidance and encouragement to families seeking to re-establish healthy relationships with significant other persons following a divorce.

In order to facilitate these kinds of positive changes, church leaders need to utilize their knowledge of the dynamics of families affected by divorce and respond in

ways that promote growth. The fifteen guidelines listed below suggest the appropriate directions ministry with families affected by divorce can take.

1. Be sensitive to non-traditional family structures. At church functions, we are used to speaking and planning in terms of the intact family. Stepparents, single parents, and non-custodial parents challenge us to be inclusive in our definition of family.

2. Describe a wide variety of families in sermons and children's stories.

3. Provide resources for stepparenting and single parenting in the church library.

4. Be sensitive to the financial strains often present in families affected by divorce. Money may not be available for youth trips, church camping, or other activities. Be prepared to offer financial assistance in a discreet manner if necessary.

5. Include stepparents, single parents, and non-custodial parents in activities at church designed for parents and/or families.

6. Be aware of schedule difficulties. Working single parents and visitation schedules often make life hectic in families affected by divorce.

7. Allow family members the freedom to talk about their unique situations if this is their desire. The topic of divorce should not be taboo.

8. Be alert to those who would compel children to offer sensitive information about the divorce of their parents. Children should not be asked to satisfy the curiosities of prying adults within the church.

9. Watch for discipline problems that may be related to a child's or teen's home situation. Open up communication concerning stress at home.

10. Ask parents to confirm any confusing instructions brought to church by their children. If children visit with non-custodial parents, it is easy for conflicting messages to be created. Confirming messages can help prevent unnecessary misunderstandings.

11. Avoid segregating parents affected by divorce unnecessarily. There are times when non-traditional families will be appropriately grouped together. At other times, however, the variety of families within the church should be allowed to mix equally.

12. Be careful to use names correctly. Children who have names different from their custodial parents need to be accurately identified.

13. Avoid judgmental attitudes. Since Christians in families affected by divorce may deal with guilt and shame, attitudes of condemnation can be especially destructive.

14. Provide positive, biblical instruction and information on marriage and family life.

15. Stress the inclusiveness of the family of God. Persons from all kinds of human families are important members of God's family.

Parenthood is a privilege blessed by God. The responsibilities of raising children are always to be accepted with gratitude and determination. Stepparents, single parents, or remarried parents wanting to practice Christian stewardship need to be committed, faithful, caring, and loving in some very specific and special ways. Divorce is a tragedy, but God's grace can provide the means for parents to relate effectively to their children when this is their desire. The church can and should continue to seek ways to help parents in families affected by divorce reach success. As a result, the family of God, the church of Jesus Christ, will be stronger, healthier, and more vital.

APPENDIX A

Letter of Invitation

June 14, 1989

Dear

As a result of our planning retreat last March, our Board of Christian Education is seeking ways to improve our ministry to families within our congregation. I am also in the midst of my work toward the Doctor of Ministry degree at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

I am writing to invite you to participate in a ministry group I will be leading next fall here at our church. The group will seek to provide a ministry to some of our church families while helping me achieve the goals of my doctoral program.

The ministry group will be for parents in families affected by divorce. This will include parents who are single or remarried, and stepparents. There will be no fee, and child care will be provided for those who need it. We will meet once a week for eight weeks at the church at a time to be selected by the members of the group.

I would be very pleased if you would be able to be a part of the group. If you would kindly return the enclosed card indicating your interest, I will contact you at a later date to discuss with you in detail the purpose, goals, and content of the ministry group. At this time, I need to know who might be interested in participating. I hope I can include you in our group.

Yours in Christ,

George E. Winters

enc.

APPENDIX B

Pregroup Interview

Biographical information

1. Sex: a. male
   b. female

2. Marital status: a. Single, married previously
   b. Married once, living with spouse
   c. Married more than once, living with spouse

3. If you are married, do you have children from your present marriage? a. yes b. no

4. Describe the custody arrangements for your:

   biological children from a previous marriage

   a. No biological children from a previous marriage
   b. Sole custody with visitation by the other parent
   c. Other parent has custody
   d. Joint custody
   e. Other (specify) _____

   stepchildren

   a. No stepchildren
   b. Sole custody with visitation by the other parent
   c. Other parent has custody
   d. Adoption
   e. Other (specify) _____

Below are descriptions of the subjects to be discussed in our ministry group. Please indicate the responses that come closest to your reaction to each subject.

High Priority	Moderate Priority	Low Priority	Does not apply to my situation

1. The effects of divorce on children.

HP MP LP DNA

Comments:

2. Communicating effectively with your children.

HP MP LP DNA

Comments:

3. Discipline with your children.

HP MP LP DNA

Comments:

4. Developing and promoting the Christian faith of your children.

HP MP LP DNA

Comments:

5. Handling parenting concerns with a former spouse.

HP MP LP DNA

Comments:

6. Visitation issues with your children.

HP MP LP DNA

Comments:

7. What other concerns are a high or moderate priority for you as a parent at this time?

APPENDIX C

Information Letter

September 14, 1989

Dear Group Members:

I appreciated the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the ministry group for parents in families affected by divorce. I am encouraged by the enthusiasm that I encountered as I visited with each of you and discussed this important project. I think that we will have a good group and with the Lord's help a very positive experience.

I am writing to you to give you the final details of the ministry group. As I guessed, there was no time during the week that all 16 of us could meet without a schedule conflict. However, with some of you willing to make some adjustments, I have chosen Monday evenings from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m., beginning October 2. Child care will be provided in the lower level of the church during our group sessions. We will meet in the church parlor, across from the sanctuary. Our final session will be on Monday, November 20, and you need to plan to be at all 8 sessions.

Please dress informally and comfortably. If some of you need to come to the group straight from work, do not worry about wearing your uniform or work clothes - come as you are.

I will be faithful with you concerning our schedule each week. We will begin at 7:00, and will end our sessions no later than 8:30.

If you have any questions about the group between now and October 2, please feel free to ask me. I am very pleased that you have agreed to participate. I am looking forward to learning together with you about the complicated and important task of Christian parenting.

Sincerely in Christ,

George E. Winters

enc.

APPENDIX D

Pretest and Posttest

Part I

On the following scales, indicate your response to the word at the top of the list. Please give your initial impressions. Place an "x" in only one space per line.

1. MARRIAGE

Good	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Bad
Strong	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Weak
Ugly	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Beautiful
Active	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Passive
Anxious	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Confident
Angry	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Friendly

2. DIVORCE

Bad	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Good
Strong	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Weak
Angry	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Friendly
Active	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Passive
Anxious	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Confident
Ugly	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Beautiful

3. PARENTING

Active	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Passive
Weak	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Strong
Ugly	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Beautiful
Good	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Bad
Anxious	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Confident
Angry	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Friendly

4. STEPPARENT

Angry	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Friendly
Strong	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Weak
Good	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Bad
Active	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Passive
Ugly	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Beautiful
Anxious	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Confident

5. STEPCHILD

Weak	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Strong
Passive	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Active
Good	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Bad
Anxious	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Confident
Friendly	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Angry
Ugly	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Beautiful

Part II

Read each statement carefully. Then indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by circling the response that most closely represents your opinion. There are no "wrong" answers.

SA=Strongly agree A=Agree U=Uncertain
D=Disagree SD=Strongly disagree

1. Divorce always produces harmful psychological reactions in children.	SA	A	U	D	SD
2. A poor self-concept formed in childhood has a tendency to improve in adulthood.	SA	A	U	D	SD
3. Discipline and punishment are pretty much the same thing.	SA	A	U	D	SD

4. Following divorce, children usually feel abandoned which makes them feel angry. SA A U D SD

5. Because of the nature of divorce, trust is something divorced parents can never rebuild. SA A U D SD

6. Shorter, more frequent visitations are preferable to fewer, longer ones. SA A U D SD

7. My Christian faith is something I can share easily with my children. SA A U D SD

8. Because children are so resilient, I should not let myself become too concerned with a child's reaction to divorce. SA A U D SD

9. A child whose absent parent maintains a good, consistent relationship with his/her custodial parent may be spared from unhealthy reactions to a divorce. SA A U D SD

10. Telling my child how I feel is difficult for me. SA A U D SD

11. I am often at a loss for ways to help my child understand and accept Christian values. SA A U D SD

12. Teaching children to respect individual differences should include the practice of compromise on the part of divorced parents. SA A U D SD

13. The best atmosphere a visiting parent can provide the children is one that maintains a balance between pleasant and unpleasant activities. SA A U D SD

14. Children should not be included in making rules and in deciding ahead of time on possible consequences for breaking them. SA A U D SD

15. Prolonged parental conflict seriously undermines children's security and trust in their parents, in themselves, and in their own futures. SA A U D SD

16. The New Testament teaches that mothering provides a woman with inherent honor. SA A U D SD

17. "I" messages are a basic requirement for close communication. SA A U D SD

18. Parents should utilize the same disciplinary measures with stepchildren as they would with their own children. SA A U D SD

19. Children find it easy to express their angry feelings about the divorce of their parents. SA A U D SD

20. When visiting with non-custodial parents, children should not be asked to do homework and chores. SA A U D SD

21. Children need to enjoy close relationships with both of their natural parents following a divorce. SA A U D SD

22. It is not a good idea to give children both clear limits and independence in matters of discipline. SA A U D SD

23. It is important for a child to see his/her parents as completely adequate. SA A U D SD

24. As a listener, I listen for both the words and feelings that are being expressed. SA A U D SD

25. It is not healthy for children to be protected from parental conflict following a divorce. SA A U D SD

26. If a visiting parent is a few minutes late once in a while, it is best to ignore it. SA A U D SD

27. I view discipline in our home as something I would rather not have to deal with. SA A U D SD

28. In the Old Testament, disobedient children are considered a curse from God. SA A U D SD

29. Remarriage of a parent has little effect on visitation. SA A U D SD

30. Children usually ignore the derogatory remarks their divorced parents make about one another. SA A U D SD

APPENDIX E

The Effects of Divorce on Children

Age 3-5

Fear
Bewilderment
Sadness
Regression
Macabre fantasy
Replaceability
Fantasy
Denial
Play
Rise in aggression
Inhibition of aggression
Guilt
Emotional need
Mastery

Age 6-8

Grief
Fear leading to disorganization
Feelings of deprivation
Yearning for departed parent
Inhibition of aggression toward departed parent
Fantasies of responsibility and reconciliation
Conflicts of loyalty

Ages 9-12

Soberness and clarity
Layering of response
Attempted mastery by activity and play
Anger
Shaken sense of identity
Alignment with one parent

Adolescence

Changed perception of parents
Changed relationship with parents
Diminished availability of family support
Worry about sex and marriage
Mourning
Anger
Perceptions in flux
Loyalty conflicts
Greater maturity and moral growth
More realistic view of money
Changed participation within the family
Strategic withdrawal
Failure to cope[1]

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[1] Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan Berlin Kelly, Surviving the Break-up (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1980), pp. 55-95.

APPENDIX F

Ten Stages of Grief

1. A state of shock
2. Expression of emotion
3. Loneliness and depression
4. Physical symptoms of distress
5. A feeling of panic
6. A sense of guilt
7. Resentment and hostility
8. Inability to return to normal activities
9. Gradually hope comes through
10. We struggle to affirm reality[2]

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[2] Granger E. Westberg, Good Grief (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), pp. 11-51.

APPENDIX G

Messages in Communication

"Solution Messages"

1. ORDERING, DIRECTING, COMMANDING

   You go find something to play with.
   You stop wrinkling the paper.
   You put those pots and pans away.

2. WARNING, ADMONISHING, THREATENING

   If you don't stop, I'll scream.
   Mother will get angry if you don't be quiet.
   If you don't get out there and put that kitchen back in the shape it was, you're going to be sorry.

3. Don't ever interrupt a person when he's reading.
   You shouldn't play when Mother is in a hurry.
   Always clean up after yourself.

4. ADVISING, GIVING SUGGESTIONS OR SOLUTIONS

   Why don't you go outside and play?
   Let me suggest something else for you to do.
   Can't you put each thing away after you use it?

"Put-down Messages"

1. JUDGING, CRITICIZING, BLAMING

   You ought to know better.
   You are being very thoughtless.
   You are being naughty.

2. NAME-CALLING, RIDICULING, SHAMING

   You're a spoiled brat!
   All right, Mr. Busybody.
   Shame on you.

3. INTERPRETING, DIAGNOSING, PSYCHOANALYZING

   You just want to get some attention.
   You're always trying to get my goat.
   You always want to play just where I'm working.[3]

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[3] Thomas Gordon, Parent Effectiveness Training (New York: P.H. Wyden Co., 1970), pp. 110-113.

APPENDIX H

Keys to Communication

1. Take time to communicate
2. Listening is important
3. Check out the meaning of messages
4. Practice empathy
5. Create a sense of caring
6. Avoid criticizing, evaluating, acting superior
7. Cultivate honesty and openness
8. Be kind

Creative and Caring Conflict Management

1. Air grievances while they are current
2. Deal with one issue at a time
3. Be specific
4. Become allies
5. Fight fair
6. Open up understanding[4]

---

[4]Nick Stinnett and John Defrain, Secrets of Strong Families (New York: Berkley Books, 1986), pp. 63-78.

APPENDIX I

Child Development Guidelines

Infant

- Love
- Trust
- Security
- Order
- Routine
- Sense of self

Toddler

- Safety
- Independence
- Aggression
- Frustration
- Limits

Preschool

- Interpreting the world around them
- Coping
- Social skills
- Learning
- Values
- Moral standards

Elementary age

- Decision-making
- Work habits
- Friendship
- Value systems
- Sexuality
- Moral questions

Adolescence

- Consistency
- Self-discipline
- Independence[5]

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[5] Barbara Brenner, Love and Discipline (New York: Random House, 1983), pp. 179-182.

APPENDIX J

Twelve Guidelines for "Authoritative" Discipline

1. Utilize effective communication skills
2. Plan ahead
3. Realize the power of your example
4. Identify and affirm appropriate behavior
5. Match expectations to child's capability
6. Be consistent and flexible
7. Make rules and limits that are clear, realistic, and current
8. Be firm when enforcing rules and limits
9. Allow choices with known consequences
10. Utilize "time outs," consequences, and withheld privileges
11. Allow children to settle their own differences
12. Avoid nagging, labeling, bribing, and hovering[6]

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[6] The above material is based on research from several volumes: Lawrence Balter, Who's In Control? (New York: Poseidon Press, 1988), pp. 30-36; Gayle Kimball, 50/50 Parenting (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath & Co., 1988), pp. 35-58; Michael Popkin, Active Parenting (Atlanta: Active Parenting, Inc., 1983), p. 47; Virginia Satir, Peoplemaking (Palo Alto, Calf.: Science and Behavior Books, 1972), pp. 96-111; The Southern Baptist Convention, Sunday School Board, Family Ministry Department, Parenting By Grace (Nashville: Convention Press, 1986), pp. 124-147.

THE FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY SCALE

AUTHORITY

LEADERSHIP

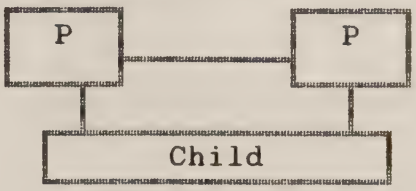
ACCOUNTABILITY

COOPERATION

RESPONSIBILITY

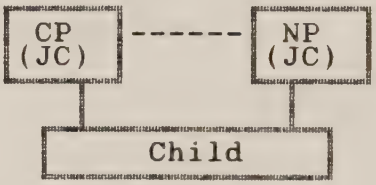
Healthy Family systems:

Intact Family



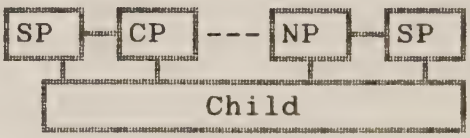
P = Parent

Divorced Family



CP=Custodial Parent JC=Joint Custody
NP=Non-custodial Parent

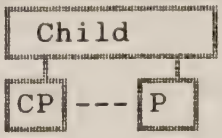
Remarried Family



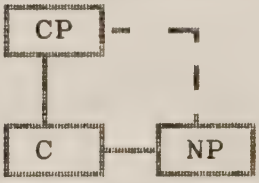
SP=Stepparent

Maladaptive Variations

Child Dominant



Custodial Parent Dominant



APPENDIX L

Guidelines for Dealing With Your Child's Other Parent

1. The more cooperation that exists between divorced parents, the better it is for the child.

2. Be honest with your child about your child's other parent. Do not lie.

3. It is extremely detrimental to children for their divorced parents to berate one another constantly.

4. If the child's other parent is lying to your child about you, express your love and concern to your child so he or she can understand the truth about you by your actions.

5. Continued hostility between divorced parents can cause harm to the children.

6. If a hostile situation exists, work toward civilizing the relationship with your child's other parent.

Visitation

1. Avoid using children to gain information or send messages.

2. Frequent shorter visits may be better than one long one.

3. Encourage, don't discourage, visitation.

4. Avoid visitation games such as: being late or not having children ready, undermining children's desire to see other parent, etc.

5. A visiting parent should avoid the "Santa Claus" syndrome and work toward establish some kind of normalcy during visits.

6. Visiting parents should maintain contact with their children through every reasonable means.[7]

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[7] Richard A. Gardner, The Parents Book About Divorce (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1977), pp. 282-330.

APPENDIX M

Helping Your Children Grow in the Christian Faith

Stages of Faith

1. Experienced faith
2. Affiliative faith
3. Searching faith
4. Mature faith

Sharing Your Faith With Your Children

1. Tell and retell the story of the Bible
2. Celebrate your faith and lives
3. Pray together
4. Listen and talk to each other about religious issues
5. Participate in acts of service and witness[8]

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[8] John H. Westerhoff, III, Bringing Up Children in the Christian Faith (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980), pp. 15-52.

APPENDIX N

Group Evaluation

The following questions refer to our ministry group. Read each statement carefully and give your honest evaluation of the group experience.

1. My overall response to this ministry group is: (circle one)

   a. very favorable
   b. favorable
   c. unfavorable
   d. very unfavorable

2. What I liked most about this group was:

3. What I liked least about this group was:

Below are the topics we covered in our group. Circle the response that indicates the extent to which you found the sessions helpful.

4. Biblical insight into parenting.

Very helpful Helpful Average Not helpful

5. The effects of divorce on children at different ages.

   VH H A NH

6. Effective communication in the Christian home.

   VH H A NH

7. Creative discipline with your child.

   VH H A NH

8. Building faith in your family.

   VH H A NH

9. Relationships with a child's "other" parent.

Very helpful Helpful Average Not helpful

10. Making the most of visitation.

VH H A NH

Below are questions about the group and its leader.

12. Room comfort.

Very satisfactory Satisfactory Unsatisfactory Very unsatisfactory

13. Length of weekly sessions.

VS S U VU

14. Number of weekly sessions.

VS S U VU

15. Preparation of group leader.

VS S U VU

16. Presentations made by group leader.

VS S U VU

17. Overall performance of group leader.

VS S U VU

18. Other comments or suggestions:

Thank you for your help in evaluating this group.

APPENDIX O

Responses to Group Evaluation Statements
Two and Three

2. What I liked most about this group was:

Getting to know one another and sharing experiences

Sharing real life situations and problems

The openness of the group in role-plays and discussions

The closeness that developed in the group and finding out that other parents had many of the same problems you do

The people

It was very easy to participate in this group. It became more like family

To hear what others go through and perhaps learn from them

Hearing how other families handle different situations

How to be a better parent as far as being a Christian parent

Getting involved with others in the same situation and being with other supportive people in similar situations

Sense of belonging, not alone in this situation, support

The widely varied home situations from which we all come helped gain a better perspective

Openness

Organization of material

The fellowship

To share others feelings - that they are not alone

Personal sharing

APPENDIX O (continued)

Responses to Group Evaluation Statements
Two and Three

2. What I liked most about this group was:

Close knit feeling, parents facing similar problems and decisions

Finding other people have the same problems

3. What I liked least about this group was:

Role-playing

Not enough discussion time

Too little time

A lot of "helpful" instructions from well-meaning people who didn't understand whole situation

Some rigid thinkers unwilling to listen, change, or compromise

Time was always too short

Was not long enough sessions

Wanted more open talk

Disliked nothing. Maybe more role-plays, less lecture

Not enough sharing

We sometimes ran out of time when good discussions opened up

Needed more time for some topics

Role-playing

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